The Point of Encounter

An investigation into the purpose, processes and theory underpinning youth work practice

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I confirm that the word count of this thesis is less than 100,000 words

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Abstract

With a widening policy framework, a broad range of funding streams and diversity of practice, youth work is a disparate profession with an ill-defined and evolving purpose. This is not only evident from the literature but also from the array of activities and practices presenting themselves as youth work. While there are definitions relating to purpose, more substantive texts exist to describe the processes and defining characteristics of youth work with greater depth. Examining these purposeful and intentional processes elucidates deeper insights in defining the purpose of youth work.

Upon a review and examination of the literature, four specific processes predominated, namely, relationship building, conversation and dialogue, participation and experiential learning. The exploration of these four processes, the underpinning theory and their relationship with the purpose of youth work form the basis of this inquiry. The study examines how youth workers perceive these processes, and their relation to its primary purpose.

The research follows a qualitative interpretivist approach to explore core characteristics of youth work involving two phases, focus groups and semi-structured interviews with qualified youth workers from Northern Ireland. These research methods assist in understanding the epistemological perspectives of youth workers as it relates to key processes and the purpose of youth work. Thirty-two youth work practitioners participated in the study.

Whilst numerous findings are presented to add to the body of knowledge there are four significant messages from the study. These pertain to youth work's clarity of purpose and identity, the questioning of normative youth work concepts and ideas and the weakness of theoretical linkages to practice. Fourthly, the

place of theory as it relates to the study is explored. This offers Jürgen Habermas' perspective of learning as a potential unifying theory and the presentation of a new model for understanding the interrelationship between the youth work processes.

Abbreviations

DENI	Department of Education Northern Ireland
EC	European Commission
edn	Edition
eds	Editors
JNC	Joint Negotiating Committee
NOS	National Occupational Standards
NSETS	North South Education and Training Standards
PfY	Priorities for Youth
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
RPA	Review of Public Administration
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
YCNI	Youth Council for Northern Ireland
YMCA	Young Men’s Christian Association
YSLF	Youth Service Liaison Forum
YSSPG	Youth Service Sectoral Partnership Group

Figures and Tables

Declaration

I declare that with effect from the date on which the thesis is deposited in Research Student Administration of Ulster University, I permit

(1) The Librarian of the University to allow the thesis to be copied in whole or in part without reference to me on the understanding that such authority applies to the provision of single copies made for study purposes or for inclusion within the stock of another library.

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Chapter One: Introduction

This study attempts to bring together four forms of scholarship identified by Boyer (1990). Scholarship, he suggests, involves discovery, integration, application and teaching. Discovery is about disciplined inquiry and comes closest to what academics call research. Integration involves the bringing together of knowledge in systematic ways drawing from a range of disciplines and thinking. The application aspect of scholarship relates to the dynamic process of applying knowledge to differing contexts. Finally, scholarship should influence the teaching and communicating of what has been learnt. These four elements are evident in each phase of the study as it deals with the topic of youth work, its purpose and the processes by which it engages young people.

At the outset of the study it is important to guide the reader regarding how this process of scholarship will be written and demonstrate the thinking behind each phase. This introductory chapter will therefore set the scene for the rest of the study and form a springboard for the subsequent chapters. Initially, the structure of the thesis is outlined, showing what is involved in each section and chapter. Subsequently, my personal reflections are presented. As this is a qualitative study, heavily influenced by interpretivist thinking with strong reflexivity and reactivity, my personal context and perspectives are delineated. The third element of this introductory chapter demonstrates an understanding of the youth sector policy framework outlining some of the implications. This mix of reflective writing with critique and analysis of the sector are presented to show a context for the rationale of the study.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured to exhibit clarity, demonstrate the academic rigour expected for this level of study and provide evidence of scholarship. There are three sections to the study: 1. The literature review; 2. The research methodology; 3. The findings, discussion, analysis and conclusions. Each section encompasses chapters relating to that aspect of the study and their content is outlined as follows.

Section One: The Literature Review

This section is divided into seven chapters which examine the literature relating to the study. Initially, the problem of definition in youth work is elucidated. This forms the basis for examining the nature and defining characteristics of youth work. Extrapolating four key processes utilised in practice is the result. In turn, these four processes of relationship building, conversation and dialogue, participation and experiential learning are critically analysed. The literature pertaining to each process is reviewed on two levels. Firstly, youth work literature is examined to locate the process in a practice context. The philosophical basis for each process is subsequently explored and critically evaluated. In summarising the literature review the ideas of Jürgen Habermas (b.1929) are posited as a potential unifying model for understanding youth work.

Section Two: The Methodology

While the shortest section of the three, the methodology of the study is arguably the most important. This section provides the rationale for using a *"particular recipe"* (Clough and Nutbrown 2012, p.25) of research methods and outlines the dilemmas and issues faced by the researcher. Arriving at a research question and understanding the philosophical paradigms utilised within the research is the initial concern. The design frame and the specific methodologies are then

discussed and critically examined. This is followed by an outline of the data analysis strategy. The ethical issues are the last consideration within this section and highlight the dichotomies which exist in this type of qualitative study.

Section Three: The Findings, Discussion, Analysis and Conclusions

The final section shows the results of the study and endeavours to systematically present the specific findings of the research. Each of the three chapters deals with differing aspects of the research. The first chapter presents the findings thematically and keeps analysis to a minimum. Rather than presenting 'raw data', the transcripts were systematically coded and assembled into relevant themes. The analysis and discussion of these findings form the basis of the penultimate chapter, delineating the issues raised by the research participants. This is analysed and discussed with consideration to the literature review. The final chapter summarises the findings and highlights the implications of the research and the contribution to knowledge.

Context of the Study: Personal Reflections

This study has been the culmination of 6 years work. It has not developed randomly or without a context or rationale. The following reflections attempt to show something of the researcher's personal journey integrated with a more objective context for the study. With over 35 years involvement in youth work as a young person, volunteer, youth worker, manager and lecturer in community youth work, I come to this subject without neutrality. Gaining experiences and perspectives throughout this period influenced me as I have grappled with the purpose of youth work. Through my youth work experience, training and teaching of the subject I notice an apparent malaise and lack of clarity across the youth work sector and literature. This has exercised me to reflect upon my youth work experience, on the theme generally, its purpose and on the distillation of key

processes. Consequently, this section outlines these reflections as an attempt to present a context and rationale for the study. My subjective reality is only a perspective but embeds this interpretative study in a contextual framework. This framework involves my experience and perception of youth work alongside a policy and youth sectoral context. It is based upon reading, personal experience, discussions with students and conversation with practitioners.

Personal Reflections on My Experience

As a young person involved in Boys Brigade and church youth activities, I saw these organisations as a place to go, to be safe, to connect with others and to gain new experiences; and learn. Upon reflection, the overriding feeling of these early experiences is one of connectedness, affection, community and even a sense of loyalty. Boys Brigade offered camaraderie and friendship for someone who did not experience these previously. While I gained new knowledge and skills through badge classes, or partaking in a sport like running or volleyball, the feelings of being included and befriended dominate.

At the age of eighteen, I undertook Boys Brigade leadership training which was not that effective in helping me understand the purpose of youth work. Informally, I realised that values of inclusion and caring for others mixed with discipline and structure and a naive idea about enabling young people to take responsibility, were core. The youth club and drop-in coffee bar, in which I later volunteered, primarily offered a place for people to ‘be’, and I saw my role as one of supervisor and relationship builder, without any other clear purpose. I was unaware if this was a sufficient understanding. Nonetheless, early engagement in youth work as a volunteer youth leader emphasised the primacy of relationship building with young people, the demonstration of care, and the embracing of

values around the promotion of ‘belonging’. While unsophisticated, these principles have remained central to my understanding.

A professional frame of reference had not been a focus of my early involvement in youth work and was only initiated when I became employed as a full-time youth worker in the early 1990s. Working with unemployed young people/young adults widened my focus on a more political dimension of youth work from that of the individual’s personal development. However, it was more of a political analysis on how the system had created unemployment, rather than facilitating the young people to engage more fully in society and bring about necessary change. Nonetheless this was a form of ‘praxis’, whereupon meeting young people who were homeless, without qualifications, in poverty, with low self-esteem, and often sitting outside society, changed my focus and beliefs about the purpose of youth work. It seemed no longer enough to just ‘be there’, ‘befriend’ and ‘care’. These initial values and practices continued to form a basis for what I was doing, but youth work had to become more purposeful. This necessitated a new socio-political analysis of the issues facing the young person, while at the same time, developing intervention strategies that were appropriate to their personal needs. This may also have involved therapeutic intervention to support them in developing self-esteem or exploring pathways to future employment.

Undertaking the community youth work course at the University of Ulster, aged 30, further developed my professional frame of reference. This educational experience added clarity and helped to synthesise my previous youth work experiences. In this process I developed interpersonal skills, learned of the historical development of community youth work and married social sciences and

other theoretical frameworks to my knowledge, skills and values. Upon completion of the degree, the professionalism of clearer boundaries, codes of ethics and youth work values, alongside enhanced skills, deepened my perspective. A new set of values, principles and practices became evident as I pursued a career in youth work for the subsequent 15 years. Over this time, I experienced the disparate nature of the sector, a breadth of theoretical perspectives, eclecticism in practice and a fragmented policy framework. This led to a conclusion that the focus is wide, unwieldy and lacking in clarity of purpose.

Reflections on Youth Work Practice

The perspective and breadth of experience which I have had over the years leads me to reflect that there often appears to be as many forms of youth work practice as there are youth workers. Reflecting on the range of youth work practice it seems this is as fragmented as the structure. From this stance there are three significant influences on practice - the setting, the methods employed and the value base. These three factors are inextricably linked to the purpose of youth work.

Youth work as a practice operates in many settings; youth clubs, church halls, outdoor education centres, on the streets, schools and even in prisons. This diversity of setting makes youth work difficult to define as the location of the practice plays a significant part in determining the purpose. Youth work in a school setting may have an objective of improving the chances for 5 GCSEs or more, while in a youth justice setting the goal could be to minimise the risk of re-offending.

The methods employed in youth work also vary with sport and recreation, group work, individual counselling or befriending and even entertainment being a focus.

These methods affect the outcome of youth work but there seems to be a lack of clarity or vagueness of purpose and little else being achieved other than keeping young people occupied.

From my observations, reflections and experience, youth work's value base and practice have some common themes but much diversity. The value base or philosophy may be religious; humanist; political; rights centred or focused on harm reduction. Regardless, the philosophical bias of the worker or organisation impacts on the practice of youth work. This diversity of value base with differing ideologies and philosophies influences the multiplicity of purposes found within youth work practice. My interest therefore lies in ascertaining if there can be a universal purpose, and whether youth work literature or youth workers can point to such a thing. This personal account illustrates the lens from which I view this study. Although I endeavour to remain objective my personal perspective shows the potential for reflexivity from the outset.

The Youth Sector and Policy Framework

The Northern Ireland youth service has evolved into these two broad sectors, the voluntary and community youth sector, and the statutory youth sector in the form of the Education Authority. The scope of this youth service is significant. In 2013 there were around 148000 young people participating in youth work activities (Department of Education 2017) across Northern Ireland. Significantly, in 2014, around 57% of the entire population of 10-12-year olds participated in youth work (YCNI 2015). The youth work sector has a far-reaching impact yet with such a diverse and disparate structure this "complex mosaic" (McCartney 1999, cited McCready 2012, p.12) is difficult to comprehend. Therefore, understanding the development of the youth sector and its policy framework forms the basis for the

next segment. While there have been many policies (appendix 1) the following gives an overview of the significant initiatives. This will present a more objective context for the study and highlight shifts in direction and emphasis, in particular, over the past 30 years.

Policy

The youth service in Northern Ireland was founded upon the efforts and interventions of faith based organisations such as the YMCA, Boys Brigade and Girls Club union etc., (McCready and Loudon 2015) stretching back to the 1840s. While there was various youth related legislation, it was not until the 1970s that youth work was formalised within a legal framework. The implementation of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) 1972 Order (HMSO 1972) instituted the first statutory youth provision in the UK and Ireland. Each of the five Education and Library Boards formed youth committees which created funding schemes for full and part time units and voluntary clubs. The Education and Training Inspectorate advised on the quality of provision while the Department of Education took an oversight role and developed subsequent policy.

Since the 1970s subsequent policy initiatives included the Policy for the Youth Service in Northern Ireland (Department of Education 1987), Youth Service Policy Review (Department of Education 1999) and, most recently, Priorities for Youth (Department of Education 2013). These policies have had varying emphases and show directional changes. Alongside these policies several strategies have also influenced youth work's direction. These policies and strategies will be reviewed and discussed to give further context to the study.

The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 made way for the subsequent policy. Paragraph 37.1 of this legislation states that *"each board shall secure the provision of adequate facilities for recreational, social, physical, cultural and youth service activities"* (HMSO 2017). The 1987 policy made 6 major proposals which included the creation of a youth work curriculum, decontrolling of statutory centres and establishing a top tier of the youth service. This top tier was to comprise of a Youth Council for Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Youth Forum & Standing Committee of Youth Organisations (later YouthNet NI). While a youth work curriculum and a top tier of the youth service were established, the decontrolling of the sector did not happen.

The 1999 policy review was an ambitious attempt to engage the whole youth sector in policy development. While some of its proposals were implemented such as the extending of youth service to include young people aged 4 -25 or further curriculum development, a subsequent policy was not forthcoming. However, as a by-product of the policy, the youth work Curriculum Development Unit was established. Furthermore, as part of this review a new partnership group, entitled the Youth Service Liaison Forum (YSLF) was devised to discuss the youth service interests. This body was instrumental in paving the way for a new youth work strategy in 2005 which ultimately led to the development of the current policy.

The Priorities for Youth (PfY) initiative emerged in parallel with the completion of the Northern Ireland Review of Public Administration (RPA). In 2005 discussions, it was agreed that the youth service should remain administered by the Department of Education, however the proposals for a new single body for Education proved one reform too many to implement. Effectively the Education

Act of 2014 simply merged the five existing Education and Library Boards into one agency, the Education Authority. In this era the current youth sector initiative, Priorities for Youth (Department of Education 2013) was born and contained four important shifts in policy direction that are continuing to affect the youth service in 2017.

These four directional shifts show an increased emphasis in targeted provision, outcomes for young people and proposed the delivery of youth work by the voluntary sector, similar to the 1987 policy. The fourth shift in direction was the proposed creation of a Practice Development Unit to ensure the continued professional development of youth workers. Consequently, the policy is changing the face of the youth service. The Practice Development Unit is in an embryonic stage in the form of an interest group. There is some progression on targeted provision on disadvantaged young people or those falling into a specific category of section 75 of the Equality Act (1998). Additionally, outcomes are being established to which youth workers should focus. The delivery of the youth service through the voluntary sector has yet to be fully realised.

This new drive of targeted intervention and working to outcomes for young people negates some of the earlier policy and practice focus. Targeted intervention lessens an emphasis on universal provision for young people while outcomes weaken the notion of participation as emphasised in the curriculum. Although not explicit about the outcomes desired for young people, the PfY document mentions the word ‘outcomes’ 45 times. Creating positive outcomes for young people or improving and enhancing their outcomes are just some of the emphases within the document. However, enshrined in the youth work curriculum is the concept and process of participation which affords young

people power in the decisions that affect them. Working to a set of pre-determined outcomes reduces the possibility of youth led programmes.

The main policy and practice thrust for youth work comes from the Department of Education. Alongside Priorities for Youth (Department of Education 2013) is the youth service curriculum (A model for effective practice, Department of Education 2003). This curriculum document is meant to act as a measuring tool for what might be considered effective youth work. However, the curriculum is closer to a set of values than a syllabus and is devoid of a specific statement of purpose, therefore making standardised practice less possible. Although the curriculum has been perceived as conservative it was an attempt *"to reflect youth work as an educational endeavour"* (Scott-McKinley 2016, p.100). A secondary issue is that of quality assurance. The Education Training Inspectorate (ETI) continues to be tasked with inspecting youth work funded by the department including voluntary sector organisation in receipt of even a small grant. This is a contentious issue as many voluntary sector organisations have multiple funding strands and would not see themselves as solely accountable to the department and its inherent policies.

Strategies

Although youth work policy sits within the Department of Education other contexts such as schools, community relations, health and justice (McCready 2012) have youth related policy. Central government too have developed other strategies to support and guide the youth sector. The Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister (now the Executive Office) initially developed a youth strategy in 2006. Their subsequent offering, Children and Young People's Strategy 2017-2027 (Northern Ireland Executive 2017), is about to be published.

There is little integration between these strategies and Priorities for youth which illustrates a division in governmental thought. Smyth (2017) criticises this lack of joined up thinking and proposes a more integrated model suggesting that the youth service should move from the auspices of the Department of Education and the Education Authority and into the executive office. This proposal recognises that youth work related policy fits best across government departments. However, the focus for youth work may become further diluted if it was to be spread so thinly across departments.

The dominance of youth work policy comes from the Department of Education, with the Education Authority now *"responsible for all of the operational functions previously carried out by the five ELBs in accordance with the Education Orders"* (Education Authority 2017). While the statutory Education Authority provide youth services they are also responsible for administering and monitoring provision in the voluntary sector. The voluntary and community sector is made up of an array of groupings with varying focuses. These include the Youth Council for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Youth Forum, regional voluntary headquarters youth organisations, the community-based sector, church-based and the uniformed groups (McCready 2012). Incorporating a range of focus and activity and with no single mission nor purpose, the voluntary youth sector appears disparate. The commonality relates to its charitable or 'not for profit' status. Nonetheless, despite its sheer scale, varying funding streams, range of agendas and historical context it produces innovative practice. The practice located in the voluntary youth sector is dichotomous, being politically conservative and radical, faith based and not, individually and socially

concerned. It represents large international organisations and small scale local community initiatives with a range of visions and mission.

Standards

To add to this complex web of policy and strategy is the array of standards and quality indicators present within the field. The Northern Ireland curriculum development unit recently developed a framework for quality assurance to advise practitioners about best practice. This, along with the ETI quality indicators adds another layer of regulations to the existing commitments made to funders by many youth work organisations. Service level agreements produced for the Education Authority by funded groups have created yet another method of bureaucracy and accountability. On a professional level, while not fully implemented in Northern Ireland, the National Occupational Standards (NOS 2014) offer a framework for youth workers to regulate practice. Furthermore, the 'North South Education and Training and Standards' (NSETS) committee is tasked to regulate degree level youth work training across the island of Ireland. Along with the recently developed Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) benchmarks for youth work, this endeavours to quality assure the training of youth workers. This disparate set of standards mechanisms does not have one standardised reference point and surely adds to the unwieldy focus of youth work.

Summary

The trends in policy, strategy and standards over the past 30 years have been outlined above and show a changing youth sector which is characterised as disparate. The current policy was not developed in a vacuum but in a wider socio-political context. However, there is no single definition of youth work and little attempt to discuss its purpose. This severely weakens the document and illustrates a significant epistemic gap. While the policy direction has moved away

from recreational activity, the specifics of the new desired outcomes are unclear. This new focus on outcomes which support young people to gain 5 GCSEs or more also counters the participation focus within the youth work curriculum. Furthermore, there has been a policy emphasis from the 1980s towards the voluntary sector as the primary deliverer of youth work. While the current restructuring within the statutory youth sector may create space for the voluntary sector to take up the mantle, this has yet to be realised. The recent policy also stresses the importance of targeted intervention on young people with issues, yet this will reduce the resources for general youth work provision. This emphasis surely problematises young people and views them as something to fix. Moreover, the multiple strategies relating to young people show a lack of joined up governmental thinking. This adds to the disparateness found in the provision and strategy for young people. Finally, the range of quality assurance mechanisms increase confusion rather than elucidate the purpose of youth work and add to the layers of bureaucracy which already exist.

The Rationale for the Study

Evidently, commentators and policy makers have found it difficult to present a clear, objective and erudite perspective on the purpose of youth work. Therefore, from this context, arriving at a singular purpose of youth work seems almost impossible. At the outset of this study it has been important to discuss some of these issues and allow the reader insight to my perspectives on youth work. I view youth work as an educative and transformative process and, as such, political. It is built upon an informal, co-learning relationship with young people using a range of interpersonal, relationship building skills, along with conversation and dialogue. At its base are a range of values and processes which seek to build esteem and empower the young person enabling them to

make decisions, take control and learn for themselves. This is far from being a neutral educative process, as Richard Shaull (1970) suggests,

> *"Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the 'practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world"* (Shaull in Freire 1970, p.16).

I reflect that youth work should accord with the latter part of this quote which brings about freedom and emancipates the individual to create change in their society.

Clearly, there is a mix of personal and professional motivation outlined above. The biographical material has been written to illustrate potential researcher bias and show my perspective on some of the relevant themes. While much of the written material in this context section was scribed in the early stage of the study it serves the purpose of demonstrating the hunches, ideas and journey of the researcher prior to research. Although much of this section has been written subjectively, it seeks to show the reader how the researcher perceived the topic in the initial phase of the study. This honest attempt at outlining the reflexive nature of the research will be further explored in the methodology section of the thesis.

At the outset of this study there were four factors which acted as drivers for the thesis, each involving perspectives, opinions and perceived objective shifts in the youth work sector and policy. The first was the conversations with practitioners

and students who were unsure of youth work's purpose. Secondly, in speaking with ETI inspectors, almost 8 years ago, there was a perception that youth workers had no clarity about what they were trying to achieve in youth work terms. The third factor was that of the changing policy context which seems to have contributed to this uncertainty regarding youth work's very definition. Finally, along with these three factors were my subjective reflections and perceptions as outlined above. This has motivated me to ascertain if youth work has a clear definition or purpose and what are the processes by which it engages young people.

The basis for the study is to clarify and test if youth workers operate with a universal purpose and how they view the processes by which they engage. The study seeks to ascertain if there is a correlation between how youth workers understand the purpose of their practice, and the literature and underpinning philosophies of youth work. This will be achieved by undertaking a review of the youth work literature to determine the actuality of a defined youth work purpose. Furthermore, the processes which youth work utilises will be scrutinised and the underpinning philosophies examined. From this basis, a research question is generated and methodologies for investigating established. Subsequently, the research examines how youth work practitioners understand the purpose of youth work. It also examines whether their knowledge and epistemological reasoning has any resemblance to the literature. Therefore, it is my intention to test out how the youth work rhetoric and theory are understood by experienced practitioners. The findings from the study support the development of a model for youth work practice, demonstrating how it relates to purpose.

Statement of Purpose and Research Question

The rationale and process outlined above illustrates the thinking behind the study and points to both the research question and purpose of the investigation. White (2017) suggests that the research question should come from a deep investigation of the literature pertaining to the subject being studied. Furthermore, Thomas (2017) argues that while there may be a question at the beginning of the study, this should be revised after the literature review. Either way, arriving at a research question is a difficult process (White 2017, p.39).

The investigation involves analysis of how youth workers relate to the theoretical basis of youth work as presented in the literature. As such, the purpose of the study is to explore aspects of youth work's written epistemology and understand how youth workers perceive the epistemological basis for their own practice. This is summed up in the following question**: What do professionally qualified youth workers understand about the purpose, processes and theory underpinning their practice?** Primarily this will involve an investigation of their views on the clarity of youth work's purpose, its distinctiveness, the processes by which workers engage young people and their theoretical perspectives. The findings from this research question will show how the subjective realities and assumptions of youth workers correlate with the ideas presented in the literature review.

Section One: Literature Review

The first substantive section of this thesis involves the review of literature pertaining to the topics and themes inherent within the study. There are six chapters incorporated in this section which relate to the purpose of youth work, four key processes and an exploration of a potential theoretical lens. Critically reviewing research, definitions, youth work literature and underpinning philosophy is the task and remit of this section.

The place of literature within this study is central and extremely important (Kuang and David 2015). According to O'Leary (2017, p.95) literature is *"essential in the development of your research question"*. Furthermore, Bolderston (2008) likens the literature review to a *"gateway to research because it informs readers about what is current and past"* (cited Kuang and David 2015, p.136). It was under this premise that the review of literature was undertaken within the early phase of this study. This literature review seeks to understand the theoretical and philosophical basis of youth work and grapple with the current debates and issues. The review began in searching for relevant literature, reviewing the material and writing analytically and critically (Cottrell 2014) about what was found. As Oliver (2014, p.125) suggests the literature review *"should involve analysis above all else".* This staged process took over three years of the study and continued to the final edit. While not a technical nor systematic review of literature, it is an examination of a body or bodies of knowledge pertaining to youth work and acts "*to create a 'space' for the (sic) research study*" (O'Leary 2017, p. 97). Although probably the most "*complex and difficult*" (Badenhorst 2016) aspect of the study it marks out the parameters of the research showing the epistemological reasoning behind the investigation.

At the outset of the review, several parameters were considered in choosing which literature to focus upon. In line with the taxonomy of Cooper (1988), the literature review attempts to have a direct focus; identify central issues; present a range of perspectives; present a wide coverage of literature; organise the literature into coherent sections and take account of the audiences reading the material. While previous research is cited throughout the literature review, the material is much closer to a theoretical review (Evans and Kowanko 2000) of the ideas which abound in the youth work context.

Outline of literature review

As such, the aim and objectives of the literature review are outlined below and show the breadth and scope of the literature being reviewed.

Aim of the literature review

- To critically examine the literature relating to the study

Objectives:

- Outline the context of youth work within UK, Ireland and specifically Northern Ireland
- Determine the defining characteristics of youth work
- Critically explore youth work's processes and underpinning philosophies
- Identify a theoretical framework for understanding the purpose of youth work

Throughout, each of these four objectives are explored in turn. The review attempts to move beyond rhetoric and deal with the substantial issues raised in the literature.

Given the contested nature and purpose of youth work it is therefore the intention that this literature review delineates the pertinent issues relating to the subject. This presents an understanding of youth work that explores its complexities yet ultimately focuses on the core purpose. The initial phase of the literature review highlights the issues pertaining to the purpose of youth work drawing on

research, reports, standards and broader youth work literature. Following this discourse, the literature relating to the defining characteristics and nature of youth work is examined to determine the processes which underpin practice. Subsequently, these processes are systematically dissected and critically scrutinised to determine their rationale, underpinning philosophies, purpose and contribution to youth work. In turn, this epistemology forms the basis for the empirical research. Finally, a theoretical perspective of education and learning is reviewed to offer an alternative insight for youth work.

Chapter Two: The Purpose of Youth Work

It has been argued that youth work is highly subjective, and the opinions and perspectives of youth workers could be perceived as solely contextual (Davies 2010). Merton et al. (2004) recognised that the youth work context too is changing and therefore this becomes a determining factor. The purpose and defining characteristics of youth work have thus been fiercely debated (Davies 2010) since its inception over 160 years ago (Jeffs and Smith 1999). While broad agreement exists about the purpose of youth work it remains contested. Given this context, seeking clarity of purpose and understanding the relevant literature is of paramount interest. The purpose of youth work has been presented in a range of forms and contexts that can be viewed from various perspectives. The following chapter exposes some of these definitions of purpose and outlines the nuanced language and ambiguity of youth work terminology.

Youth work's purpose is implicitly presented within the legislative and policy frameworks and offer perspectives and emphases which contrast slightly within each jurisdiction in Ireland. In Northern Ireland the language has been dominated by the youth work curriculum (Department of Education 2003). Here the parlance refers to youth work as personal and social development. Moreover, the latest policy, *Priorities for Youth*, emphasises the characteristics of youth work but does not extend to a definition. This includes such ideas as voluntary engagement, non-formal education and, importantly, that it *"should complement the formal education service"* (Department of Education 2013, p. 1).

The youth work terminology used within the Northern Ireland context shows a gravitation towards the use of non-formal rather than informal education. While the term informal education is utilised within England and Wales (Jeffs and Smith

2010; Ord 2016a) Northern Ireland has been more ambiguous with evolving phraseology. The ‘Policy for Youth Service in Northern Ireland’ (Department of Education 1987) writes almost exclusively of youth work or youth service. Subsequently, the curriculum document, ‘a model for effective practice’ (Department of Education 2003) utilised the terms youth work and informal education synonymously. Most recently, the current policy of ‘priorities for youth’ (Department of Education 2013) does not use the term ‘informal education’, rather non-formal education is utilised.

There is some ambiguity about the language of formal, informal and non-formal education (Fordham 1993). Colley et al. (2002) appraise the terms and similarly recognise the ambiguous nature of the terminology in relation to the area of lifelong learning. However, while contested, the terms have definitions (European Commission 2001; Colley et al 2002). According to the EC (2001) one differentiation resides in the intentions of the learner. Within informal education the learning is non-intentional whereas formal (usually a school context) and non-formal (non-school) contexts, it is thought to be intentional. A second differentiation relates to accreditation, with formal education having this as a clear aim while non-formal and informal do not stress accreditation.

Fordham (1993) offers greater clarity in defining informal, non-formal and formal education. He cites ‘Coombs typology of educational programmes’ to illustrate the defining features of all three forms of education. Informal education is defined as a lifelong process whereby individuals obtain a range of values, attitude, knowledge and skills from everyday experiences. Conversely, formal education refers to the chronologically graded and hierarchically structured educational system which runs from primary school to higher education. It includes other

forms of academic and qualification-based study. In contrast, non-formal education is defined as *"organised educational activity outside the established formal system-whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity-that is intended to serve identifiable learning clientèle and learning objectives"* (Combs et al 1973 cited Fordham 1993). Furthermore, Fordham (Ibid.) suggests that formal works to a curriculum, while non-formal negotiates the curriculum and informal is without a curriculum.

De facto, non-formal education resides in between formal and informal education and can be defined as youth work. As such, it requires intervention by the youth worker and is action orientated. In the context of Northern Ireland non-formal education has become synonymous with youth work. While there are those that call it informal education, the evolutionary process towards non-formal education could be due to the positioning of youth work inside the Department of Education. It also may be viewed as a pragmatic policy decision to lessen the tension between formal and informal settings for youth work. While no direct correlation has been made Harland et al. (2005) recognised this tension within a previous study. In one sense non-formal education might be a convenient 'fix' for these inherent tensions.

The legislative framework in the Republic of Ireland also aligns itself to personal and social development and a voluntary principle but unlike Northern Ireland, enshrines it in law.

> *"Youth work means a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of*

> *young persons through their voluntary participation…"* (Youth Work Act 2001 cited Devlin and Tierney 2010, p.10).

In an evaluation of the impact of youth work in England, Merton et al. (2004, p.29) identified an overarching purpose, when young people are enabled to "*operate independently in the world*". This understanding highlights a desired outcome that may be difficult to measure but nonetheless provides a functional vision for a profession. Young (2006) articulates the purpose of youth work in less functional terms erring towards the philosophical, and a form of self-actualisation. She states that the

> "*core purpose of youth work is to engage with young people in the process of moral philosophising through which they make sense of the world, increasingly integrate their values, actions and identity, and take charge of themselves as empowered human beings*" (ibid. 2006, p.59).

She further expands upon this understanding (Young 2010) marking critical dialogue as the key process to develop insights and skills in perfecting their moral character. This is a significantly contrasted explanation to the broader and often more straightforward definitions and understandings of the purpose of youth work. Nonetheless, both definitions place the young person centrally, emphasising their development towards autonomous, independent thinking and action.

Youth work is also set within a professional framework with a set of standards presenting a broad statement of intent. The National Occupational Standards (National Occupational Standards, 2014) highlight a range of vocabulary which

helps to frame youth work. This standards body states that the key purpose of youth work is to

> "e*nable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential"* (ibid. p.3).

Going further, the body indicates that this type of development can be*, "physical, political and spiritual"* (ibid. p.3). These statements are beset with terms that have formed the backbone of youth work parlance over the years and consequently are in danger of becoming clichés, thus weakening their meaning. The dominance of words such as 'enable', 'voice' and 'potential' are illustrative. Nonetheless, the emphasis on holistic personal development that also has a social and educational bias have become central themes which have been embraced within much of the recent literature (Davies and Merton 2009; Devlin and Gunning 2009; Batsleer and Davies 2010; Jeffs and Smith 2010).

Sapin (2009, p.10) condenses the purpose of youth work to "*promote social, educational and political changes at various levels".* While this straightforward account conveys a focus for youth work, the ideas of it being political and the emphasis on change add further depth and dimension. The political focus of youth work is contended. Batsleer (2010, p.153) argues that youth work often takes up a critical stance, in a place of *"permanent opposition"* to the status quo, arguing for political change and development. This radical voice in youth work may not always be apparent or shared as a key purpose. Conversely, youth work can sometimes become compliant to the *"prevailing social trends"* (ibid.

p.153) seeking to appease or keep in line with government policy because of issues such as funding, ideology or self-interest. However, Sercombe (2010) recognises the dichotomy of promoting agency with young people, recognising the tension between change on an individual level or that with a community or societal focus.

Nonetheless, Mahony (2001, p.17) gives a more fundamental sole purpose, in defining youth work's aim as simply 'education' and stating that youth work is synonymously informal education. The informal education which is explored by Mahony (ibid.) emphasises the process and the relationships in which youth workers engage. Jeffs (2011, p.3) further simplifies the debate by stating that youth work

> "*is about offering young people opportunities for meaningful contact with wise, virtuous, mature and well-educated adults: Adults able to teach the immature via dialogue and example – it is that basic".*

While quite a simple explanation, Jeffs contends that youth work's purpose is educative yet with a strong relational dimension.

These definitions, while not the same, share a common purpose, positioning themselves within the broadly aligned term of social pedagogy. Although this term is not a neat fit, social pedagogy is concerned with similar themes to that of youth work and informal education. Smith (2009) outlines three concerns of social pedagogy relating to socialisation, how it addresses social issues and its alignment to such educational thinkers as John Dewey and Paolo Freire. Furthermore, it is argued that social pedagogy is located where care and education meet (Petrie 2011). Framing youth work as a pedagogical or

educational act within a social context has a strong emphasis across the literature.

Seal (2016) utilises the aligned phrase, critical pedagogy, to define youth work. Stemming from the educational movement of Paulo Freire (1921-1997), critical pedagogy seeks to address issues of power in the educational context whereby individuals can address the issues which face them. Giroux (2010) suggests that it should enable a consciousness relating to freedom, bring about a recognition of authoritarian tendencies in educational environments and thus, connecting knowledge to power which ultimately leads to constructive action by the learner. While critical pedagogy has differing perspectives, these are united by an emphasis on a *"dynamic, dialectical view of knowledge creation"* (Aristotle 1976 cited Seal 2016, p. 264). Youth work as a dialogical and critical pedagogy has diversity and tensions within its philosophical roots (Seal 2014). According to Seal (2016) there is also a dichotomy with a critical pedagogical approach which struggles to differentiate between the agency of the individual and tackling the structural inequality which makes learning less possible. This dichotomy raises a central theme in the literature about the type of knowledge which is being co-created between the youth worker and the young person. This tension between the personal and the political perspectives of youth work becomes apparent as the research develops.

The Defining Characteristics and Nature of Youth Work

Articulating the purpose and definition of youth work may seem easy. It is simply working with young people. However, in outlining a range of definitions and standpoints, while there is some agreement, the language is ambiguous in meaning. While the named purpose of youth work may be articulated or

expressed in philosophical terms about the individual or in political rhetoric, or as education or personal and social development, it is not always clear what is meant by these terms. Young (2006) cites one of Plato's dialogues with Socrates as an example of this predicament. Rather than define the concept of courage, Socrates gives an example of its nature. Young relates this to the problem of defining youth work. While attempts have been made to define its purpose, the nature and defining characteristics, along with the processes involved in practice, are more often cited than a clear and articulate definition and purpose.

Therefore, to understand the purpose of youth work it is necessary to grapple with its nature and defining characteristics and delve deeper into the processes which underpin practice. As in the Socratic dialogue outlined by Young (2006), like courage, youth work needs to be understood by its characteristics and the processes it utilises rather than solely in terms of its named purpose. In turn, this should uncover the depth and significance of its meaning and purpose.

The defining characteristics and nature of youth work have been articulated by a range of writers (Jeffs and Smith 2005, 2010; Davies 2005, 2010, 2015; Young 2006; In Defence of Youth Work 2011; Dickson et al. 2013 [see Table 2.1]). Though having much in common, these lists of characteristics diverge somewhat. Similarly, the language used in describing these characteristics varies slightly, and terms such as 'distinguishing elements' (Jeffs and Smith 2010), 'defining characteristics' (Davies 2005, 2015), 'cornerstones' (In Defence of Youth Work 2011) and the 'nature of youth work' (Harland et al. 2005) have been employed. Furthermore, in a substantive review of 93 evaluations of practice, Dickson et al. (2013) identify nine core characteristics of youth work. While not all characteristics were evident in all the evaluations of youth work

practice, they did inform an 'overall understanding' for their study. In examining this literature, over twenty characteristics can be extrapolated. These characteristics overlap considerably, notwithstanding the influence they have had upon each other. Consequently, this section will condense, summarise, review and analyse these characteristics, delineate their understanding and create thematic groupings to further explore their theoretical constructs. The characteristics are condensed under the following headings, young people; voluntary participation; association; democracy; and education and welfare.

Youth Work Authors	Terminology to Define Youth Work
Jeffs and Smith 2005, 2010	Distinguishing Elements
Davies 2005, 2010, 2015	Defining Characteristics
Harland et al. 2005; Young 2006; Harland and Morgan 2006	Nature of Youth Work
In Defence of Youth Work 2011	Cornerstones
Dickson et al. 2013	Core Characteristics

Table 2.1Terminology utilised to define youth work

Young People

According to Spence (2005) the idea of youth is contested, but she recognises some consensus that youth work supports young people through the transitions of the teenage years. Youth work, with its focus on young people is an age specific activity. While the age range varies from region to region, for example in Northern Ireland, 4-18, with some support for those aged 19-25 (Department of Education 2013) and in Wales 11-25 (Welsh Assembly Government 2007), all have a central focus on the teenage years. Davies (2005, p.7) suggests that a defining characteristic of youth work is that young people should be *"perceived and received as young people"*. His assertions not only recognise young people

as individuals, but also challenge the negative labels that are associated with them. These claims emphasise the value and importance of young people and their culture, and it is from this basis that youth work is primarily characterised. While at one level it is obvious that youth work is involved with a specific age group, yet, at another, it places value and respect on the young person, esteeming and advocating for their place in society. As such, youth work focuses on young people and primarily the transition through the teenage years.

Voluntary Participation

Bernard Davies (2005) poses 9 rhetorical questions to determine the defining characteristics of youth work. His initial question is clear and pivotal across the youth work field in Britain and Ireland: Is the young person's engagement voluntary? This rhetorical question determines what he believes is a primary defining characteristic of youth work, that voluntary participation is paramount. The voluntary principle emphasises the choice that young people make when getting involved in youth work. This principle asserts that the young person should hold a high degree of power in the relationship with the worker. Ultimately, they are freely able to engage or disengage with the youth work process. Jeffs and Smith (2010) argue that from its inception, arguably in the 1850s (Young 2006), this voluntary principle has been one of 5 key elements which distinguish youth work from other 'welfare activities' (Jeffs and Smith 2010, p.2). This distinguishing characteristic enables a more equal relationship where dialogue rather than imposition is the focus and consequently leads to the young person exercising judgement and becoming an active citizen (ibid.).

While the voluntary principle has been deemed a defining characteristic (Jeffs and Smith 2005, 2010; Davies 2005, 2010; Young 2006; In Defence of Youth

Work 2010; Dickson et al. 2013), Jon Ord (2009) offers an alternative view. He questions its centrality and the necessity of such a principle in defining youth work, arguing that even in a context like prison, where young people are incarcerated, they have a psychological choice to participate, though it is compulsory to be there. The young person, he argues, can withdraw emotionally and psychologically even when physically present. It is open to debate whether voluntary participation is a core element within youth work practice. Nonetheless, the location of power between the youth worker and the young person is crucial in the development of this relationship. As Ord (2009, p.11) suggests, practice should contain *"a critical awareness of 'power and authority''* regardless of the context of the youth work. Whilst being defined as a starting point, the voluntary principle is an initial manifestation of power being placed, at least to some degree, with the young person (Davies 2005).

Association

Jeffs and Smith (2010) argue that association, relationship and community are distinguishing features of youth work. Building relationships with young people in a safe environment where the 'power balance' is tipped in their favour, Davies (2005) suggests, is central to the youth work process. Doyle and Smith (1999) further recognise the *"educative power of playing one's part in a group or association"* (cited in Jeffs and Smith 2010, p.3) and that this has been a staple part of youth work parlance and thinking since its inception. Youth work, Jeffs and Smith (2010) assert, is fundamentally about community. This 'community' emphasis continues to be recognised and embraced in current youth work practice. More recently the campaign group In Defence of Youth Work (2011, p.7) articulate association as a cornerstone for the practice and emphasise the importance of fostering "*supportive relationships"* as central. In Northern Ireland,

with its socio-political conflict, 'interdependence' has become a defining principle in youth work (Department of Education 2003). While not synonymous with the concept of association, it places a strong emphasis on community, relationships and fostering a sense of belonging.

Although there should be a focus on the individual's needs and rights (Davies 2005), association enables young people to work and learn collectively. Working with the collective, Davies (2005) argues, reaches into the culture of young people, acknowledges their peer networks and meets them on their terms. Association favours the collective and places a value on working collectively with young people.

Democracy

The youth work campaign group, In Defence of Youth Work (2011, p.7) call for an insistence upon a *"democratic practice"* where every effort should be made to ensure that young people *"play the fullest part in making decisions about anything affecting them"* (ibid.). This assertion places power, participation and democracy firmly at the centre of youth work. While not mentioned specifically by all writers these principles are implicit within many of the other defining characteristics of youth work. Davies (2005) in his manifesto for youth work emphasises the place of power and participation throughout. He suggests that tipping power in favour of the young person; working with them on their terms; and nurturing personal commitment rather than compliance, are principles and ideas which give greater control. Jeffs and Smith (2005, p.55) further argue that fostering democracy enables young people to "*learn and organise things for themselves".*

Democracy in youth work terms, proposes a paradigm shift from the other power relationships that exist between young people and adults. For democracy to flourish, this relationship should be marked by *"mutual respect, a concern for other's needs, and a belief in community"* (ibid., p. 56). Clearly, this is an overarching principle and ultimately a characteristic that defines youth work as a practice and considers power to be a key factor in learning.

Education and Welfare

While there may be a view that youth work exists to 'keep young people off the streets', Jeffs and Smith (2010) argue that since the foundation of youth work, the more purposeful goals of education and welfare have been defining elements. The welfare element of youth work has developed throughout history. Early philanthropic activities with homeless young men, in the 1850s with organisations like the YMCA (Young 2006), have evolved into more contemporary interventions such as counselling, careers advice and support groups (Jeffs and Smith 2010).

As previously discussed, most definitions of youth work emphasise its educational and developmental focus. Mahony (2001) goes further, suggesting that youth work's aim is education. He contends that youth work is informal education whereby the environment is central to the learning process. Unlike formal education where the structure and content drive the process, the informality of youth work and the processes involved are the tools that support the learning. However, while Mahony (2001) endeavours to define what is meant by education, he falls short of a comprehensive definition, other than to give illustrations of how it may be manifested in practice through conversation and relationship. Elsewhere, Harland et al., (2005) discuss the complexities of the

educative purposes of youth work. They highlight a range of educational opportunities afforded to young people, ranging from youth work that supports formal education to the less formal development of interpersonal skills, attitudes and values. While youth work has been used to support the increase of academic attainment, health promotion or to increase confidence it is not always clear in the literature if, or even which of these aims best reflect its purpose.

Jeffs and Smith (2010) conversely illustrate a range of educational models and concepts that have influenced the practice of youth work. Informal education, social education and experiential learning are cited as models of social pedagogy used within youth work (ibid.) that again reinforce the distinctive nature of 'education' in youth work. While there is some agreement about the aim of the education in which youth work is engaged, there is, however, much unity about the processes and methods employed. These processes, which will be explored in due course, focus on learning through conversation, experience and relationship, with an emphasis on democracy (Jeffs and Smith 2005 & 2010; Davies 2005; Young 2006; Batsleer 2008; *In Defence of Youth Work*, 2011).

The education that is proposed by youth work writers is ambiguous and the aims are not always clear. However, there is a strong emphasis on 'how' it should be achieved. That being the case, the youth worker then becomes pivotal in this educational endeavour. As such, In Defence of Youth Work (2011, p.7) writes of the essential significance of the youth worker, arguing that their *"outlook, integrity and autonomy is at the heart of fashioning a serious yet humorous, improvisatory yet rehearsed educational practice with young people".* It can therefore be argued that the methods employed, the environment created and the relationship

between the youth worker and the young person are the focus in the youth work process rather than the educational outcome, output or 'product'.

Summary

In recapping, the defining characteristics of youth work can therefore be summarised to the following five areas. Although it may seem obvious, young people are central to youth work. However, this first defining characteristic not only emphasises the age cohort but also maintains a principle that young people are paramount within the process. Youth work values such as respect and fairness and inclusion (Jeffs and Smith 2005; Wise and Harrison 2005) place the rights and needs of young people at the centre of youth work. While this rhetoric is open to debate, few deny that young people are placed at the core of youth work. Voluntary participation too, has at its heart, the interests of young people. This principle, while contested (Ord 2009), places an emphasis on the young person's power in the youth work relationship. The young person can engage or disengage at their will. As Davies (2005) argues, the power should be tipped in favour of the young person. However, in educational settings the educator is likely to maintain much of the power, thereby necessitating critical examination of this principle. The principle, while honourable, may not be evident in all youth work practice. Yet, it may act as a form of conscience when reflecting upon the power relations within youth work. Association as a distinguishing element of youth work places emphasis on ideas and concepts such as community and the collective. This again is a deeply value laden characteristic, which is possibly in the decline within this more individualistic society (Smith 2001a). Nevertheless, association is stated to assist young people to develop relationships and learn together (Jeffs and Smith 2005).

Democracy as a defining characteristic of youth work, arguably distinguishes it from other professional practice with young people. As with the voluntary principle, power and ownership are placed with the young person. Participation is the central thrust of this characteristic, where young people are at the heart of the decisions that affect them. However, while democratic principles are a key focus of youth work practice, the degree to which young people determine their destiny is debatable and may be restricted. Nonetheless, the less hierarchical structure of youth work with an emphasis on equality creates more balanced power relationships with youth workers. Finally, education and welfare as marked characteristics of youth work articulate something about its aim and purpose, but the lack of agreement about the type of welfare or educational focus creates some ambiguity about the specific intentions of youth work. Despite this, there is much agreement within the youth work profession (NOS 2014; NYA 2000) about the processes and principles employed in educational and welfare activities, namely, conversation, relationship and participation.

While there is broad agreement that education, learning and development are purposes of youth work, the defining characteristics assist in identifying its intrinsic nature. These defining features and nature of youth work make stronger connections to the inherent processes and principles rather than to a specific educational outcome. This assertion is supported by a study into the state of youth work in England by Davies and Merton (2009). They found that workers had gathered, not only around the defining characteristics, but were defining youth work in terms of processes. Therefore, in the following section these processes, their underlying principles and philosophies are explored and

evaluated as the relevant literature is reviewed. Understanding the processes involved in youth work should enable a deeper appreciation of its purpose.

Four Emerging Processes

Whilst an exploration of the defining characteristics further exposed the definition and purpose of youth work there is a need for a more comprehensive understanding of the processes which are utilised in practice. Underneath the statements of purpose and the defining characteristics of youth work are several processes with underpinning principles, practices and philosophies that are central to the purpose of youth work. If, as Gallagher and Morgan (2013) suggest, the product of youth work is the process by which youth workers engage young people then it is worthy of investigation. Upon critical examination of the youth work literature, four key processes have emerged. The core processes of relationship building, conversation, participation and learning through experience are evident not only throughout the defining characteristics (as outlined above) but in the wider youth work literature. Though not necessarily exhaustive, these processes lead to a deeper understanding of the purpose of youth work as each has differing philosophical standpoints.

Working with young people relationally and the **relationship building** process have been highlighted as core to youth work (Davies 2005, 2015; In Defence of Youth Work 2011). Yet within these ideas are inherent assumptions and theoretical underpinnings which need further exploration. **Conversation and dialogue** within the context of youth work have been written about extensively (Jeffs and Smith 2005; Batsleer 2008; Smith 2010; Ord 2016a). However, grappling with the theory behind this practice and process necessitates deeper investigation. Thirdly, an emphasis on power and democracy for young people in

general and within the youth work has brought about much thinking on the concept and process of **participation** (Wierenga 2003; McCready 2011; McCready and Dilworth 2014). In dealing with the nature of such a concept it is essential to determine its philosophical basis, how it fits with youth work and what is thought to be achieved through participation. Finally, implicit in many of the defining characteristics of youth work there is a strong emphasis on **learning through experience and experiential learning** (Davies and Merton 2009; Jeffs and Smith 2010; In Defence of Youth Work 2011; Ord 2012). While the roots of this idea can be found in education, the intrinsic concepts within this theme should be examined to analyse the connections to youth work.

These processes of learning through experience, participation, conversation and relationship building, will be explored to develop a more comprehensive understanding of youth work and its purpose. The investigation of these processes will show a depth to youth work with underpinning philosophical assumptions. It is this philosophical basis that will be unearthed as each process is investigated in turn. Seal and Frost (2014) suggest that behind the critical pedagogy of youth work there are a range of philosophical assumptions which should be understood. They attest that the youth work profession is not made up of cherry picking charlatans or postmodern chameleons. Rather, youth work has coherence between a range of philosophical influences and themes.

Therefore, the following chapters of this literature review will explore each process in turn, discovering its philosophical and theoretical roots. As the study endeavours to explore the purpose of youth work in Northern Ireland, each of the four processes will involve an initial investigation of mostly British and Irish youth work literature. Subsequently, wider international and philosophically based

literature will be examined. This wider examination of literature will offer an in-depth explication of the theoretical and philosophical constructs underpinning each process. Grappling with the ideas and philosophical roots of these processes will enable a deeper understanding of the purpose of youth work and help to develop a unifying theoretical and philosophical framework. It stands that deeper analysis and exploration of the processes will uncover a purpose and insight that is not always clear, thus adding to the epistemology of youth work.

Chapter Three: Relationship Building

In conversation with students and youth work practitioners a common-sense term that is used about the purpose of youth work is building relationships. Likewise, in the youth work literature the assertion that *"relationships are at the heart of youth work practice"* (Blacker 2010, p.17) is both implicitly and explicitly emphasised (Davies 2005; Jeffs and Smith 2005, 2008; Ord 2007; Batsleer 2008; Sapin 2013). Furthermore, Ingram and Harris (2005) suggest that in youth work, the making of a relationship is paramount, while Brendtro and Ness (1983) write of it as being primary. Likewise, Jeffs and Smith (2008) name association and connecting with others through relationships as a defining characteristic of youth work, while the In Defence of Youth Work (2011) campaign see supporting and fostering relationships as a cornerstone of the profession.

Relationships and relationship building are often described in these superlative terms with little sense of what is meant. Both the term 'relationship building' and the purpose of such a process are ambiguous in meaning and not so clearly defined in much of the literature. Therefore, within this section, scrutinising the concept and nature of the relationship is the primary concern. Added to this will be an exploration of the purpose of the relationship building process and its significance for youth work.

The word 'relationship' has its origins in Latin. Tiffany (2001, p.94) suggests that it could simply mean *"to relate something to somebody".* The word suggests the forming of a connection between two bodies, objects or ideas. Relationship is therefore a descriptive word, which involves 'coming together' with little explicit reference to the qualitative nature or purpose of such a process. Even within youth work literature an initial definition is quite descriptive and refers to

relationship as *"a connection between two people in which some sort of exchange takes place"* (Goetschius and Tash 1967, cited in Blacker 2010, p.15). However, the youth work literature does not end there and while ambiguous, a range of insights about the purpose, nature and quality of relationships can be found that identify some of the inherent complexities in such a process.

Purpose of Building Relationships

The purpose of building relationships in a youth work context is not fully explicit across the youth work literature. However, there is broad agreement that it should help to promote learning. Tiffany (2001) and Blacker (2010) make this assertion, identifying the power of the relationship in supporting young people to learn. The assumption is that the relationship fosters a positive learning environment and creates numerous opportunities to facilitate learning. Therefore, learning can be seen as "*a product of the relationships we have with young people"* (Tiffany 2001, p.97). Furthermore, Blacker (2010) suggests the relationship itself is influenced heavily by the intended purpose and the role of the youth worker. That being the case, it is necessary to further reflect on the nature and quality of such a relationship.

Nature of the Youth Work Relationship

As with the defining characteristics of youth work, the nature of the relationship building process is marked by several underlying principles and values. These principles and values have sometimes become shorthand for youth work's distinctiveness and purpose. However, Davies (2005) expresses caution to this notion and posits that the distinctiveness of youth work lies in the methods and processes that it employs rather than solely the principles or values which it

embraces. Therefore, the principles underpinning the nature of the relationship building process are intertwined with the methods employed.

As previously discussed, the voluntary principle, also known as voluntary participation, is seen by some as a necessary and defining characteristic of youth work (Davies 2005; Jeffs and Smith 2005, 2008; Batsleer 2008). As already established, the necessity of the voluntary principle as a precursor for defining youth work is a contested idea (Ord 2007, 2009). Nonetheless, a range of values and principles about the nature of the relationship in a youth work context stem from the concept of voluntary participation.

Sapin (2009, p.54) argues that the 'voluntary principle' affects the nature of the relationship between the young person and the youth worker. The non-obligatory form of this relationship arguably helps to create an environment where the young person retains a high level of power, deciding whether or how much to participate. Davies (2005, p.9) further argues that the voluntary principle creates the starting point for the relationship building process between the youth worker and the young person stating, *"practitioners have no choice but to negotiate with young people"*. He contends that this negotiated starting point places more power with the young person. Murphy and Ord (2013) similarly write of the power imbalance, highlighting the need for clear boundaries in the relationship between the worker and the young person, while at the same time being willing to engage on a personal level, through appropriate self- disclosure. While the intention is to tip the power in favour of the young person, it is easy to perceive how a power relationship of this nature can be misused.

Batsleer (2008) further endorses the voluntary principle in the relationship building process introducing the idea and metaphor of accompaniment. She likens the process to that of a musical accompanist where the cooperation is highly valued, and a strong bond and relationship is found between the two musicians. Using this metaphor, the relationship has a flow and ebb which contributes to the quality and performance of the engagement. Similarly, accompanying has been likened to a journey (Christian and Green 1998), journeying with young people voluntarily to support and work with them on achieving wholeness. In using the concept and idea of accompanying, Batsleer (2008) and previously Christian and Green (1998) recognise the need for working with young people in negotiated ways rather than with presupposed agendas. While the voluntary principle is a contested notion as a defining characteristic in youth work, the values and principles underlying the concept are broadly agreed (Davies 2005; Ord 2009). The fundamental desire evident in the youth work literature is in having more equal dealings with the young person (Davies 2005), thus defining the nature of the relationship that is built.

The nature of the relationship is defined by other characteristics and principles. Creating a space that accepts, tolerates and respects the young person as an individual is promoted across the literature (Davies 2005; Young 2006; Batsleer 2008; Sapin 2009; Henry et al. 2010; Frost 2014). In the initial phase of the relationship this helps in establishing an environment which builds trust and develops openness (Jeffs and Smith 2005; Batsleer 2008; Gharahaghi 2008). At one level this seems simplistic but the complex nature and the range of variables that exist in the relationship necessitates the use of a wide range of qualities, skills and expertise by the youth worker (Blacker 2010).

Tiffany (2001, p.99) identifies three sets of qualities in such a relationship: trust and commitment; mutuality and appreciating vulnerability. Trust and commitment, he argues, demands both thoughtful and emotional investment by all concerned. Trusting relationships, he further contends, allow for learning to take place and opportunities to be given for reflection on issues such as conflict, anxieties and concerns encountered by the young person. As with the equality that Davies (2005) strives for between the young person and the youth worker, mutuality is akin to the co-learning nature of the relationship emphasised by Freire (1970), which is examined in depth particularly in chapter four. This emphasis on mutuality necessitates a commitment to change on both the young person and the youth worker (Tiffany 2001, p.101). The third quality of a learning relationship highlighted by Tiffany is appreciating vulnerability. Here, the vulnerability of the young person is emphasised and acknowledged. Tiffany's (2001) premise assumes that as the young person may have encountered negative relationships in a previous learning experience, the youth worker should therefore demonstrate sensitivity, openness and empathy in their relationships with young people.

The emphasis within the youth work literature leans towards a belief that young people learn best in relationships. In this case the relationship is with the youth worker. Fostering trust and openness, demonstrating respect and acceptance and 'journeying' alongside the young person, with their voluntary consent, define the nature and qualities of this learning relationship. Arguably, these characteristics are not unique to the youth work experience and context. However, they dominate the parlance and discourse of the epistemology of youth work and inform practice across the sector.

The importance, purpose, nature and quality of the relationships have been identified within the British and Irish youth work literature. However, as Brendtro and Larson (2006, p.58) suggest, the concept of relationship can be *"rather vague"*. It is therefore necessary to examine some of the assumptions, theory and philosophy which underpin such a concept. The ensuing section will endeavour to explore these issues.

Relationships and Learning: A Rogerian Perspective

Relationships and learning are not the exclusive domain of youth work. While there is a strong emphasis in the youth work literature, building relationships to support learning has roots elsewhere. Carl Rogers (1902 – 1987), an American psychotherapist and educationalist responsible for the person/learner centred approach suggests that learning is facilitated though the interpersonal relationship rather than something that is taught (Rogers 1967). He consistently refers to the educator as facilitator (Rogers 1967, 1977, 1980.) The traditional notion of teaching and imparting knowledge, he suggests, may work in an unchanging environment but facilitating learning should be the goal of education in a world that is ever changing (Rogers 1977; Rogers and Freiberg 1994). His central contention is that *"facilitation of significant learning rests upon certain attitudinal qualities that exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learner"* (Rogers 1967, p.27). Rogers' premise for learning reflects the psychotherapeutic processes which are encapsulated in the three core conditions of his person-centred approach. Originally, Rogers (1957, p.95) identified six conditions which he viewed as "*necessary and sufficient to bring about constructive personality change"*. These were later condensed to the three core conditions of 'congruence', 'unconditional positive regard' and 'accurate empathic response' (Rogers 1967, 1980). By the early 1980s the three

core conditions of the person-centred approach were recognised as common phraseology and practice in the psychotherapeutic field (Kirschenbaum and Jourdan 2005; Samstag 2007) and in his seminal text, *Freedom to Learn*, Rogers and Freiberg (1994) outline how the three core conditions apply to the context of learning.

The first of the three conditions is congruence which is also referred to as genuineness. The emphasis within this condition is of the need to be real and authentic within the client/therapist or educator/learner relationship. Importance is therefore stressed on *"a close matching or congruence between what is being experienced at the gut level, what is present in awareness and what is expressed"* (Rogers 1980, p.116) by the educator to the learner. Rogers contends that if congruence and genuineness are present, then a relationship that is true and therefore facilitative is the consequence of such a condition. The underlying assumption is this; if the relationship entered with the learner is free from façade and is real then the facilitator/educator will be more effective (Rogers and Freiberg 1994). Natiello (2001, p.8) argues that

> *"the ability to maintain congruence is reinforced by intense self-awareness, self-acceptance, vigilance and the courage to be transparent i.e., to allow the true self to be seen or communicated"*.

This emphasis challenges the youth worker, educator or therapist to be in tune with oneself to a very high level. This emphasis is borne out by Rogers (1967) who singles out congruence as the single most important component and the most difficult to achieve. Being truly honest and real requires the educator being this way about oneself and it is this attitude that brings about growth in others.

While the word is not specifically used by Rogers, Kreber et al., (2007) similarly argue that authenticity is inherent in his concept of congruence, and as such facilitates learning.

Unconditional positive regard is the second condition which Rogers (1957, 1967, 1980) identifies to facilitate change and enhance learning. The focus of this condition is on acceptance, prizing or non-possessive caring (Rogers 1967) for the 'other' regardless of what is presented. Since 1957 Carl Rogers has consistently emphasised this condition since the inception of the person-centred approach. Stemming from a humanistic psychological perspective, his belief and premise for this condition is clear. Rogers (1967, p.29) states that, *"the facilitator's prizing or acceptance of the learner is an operational expression of her essential confidence and trust in the capacity of the human organism"*. This type of unconditional positive regard towards the learner, Rogers (1980, p.116) suggests, makes "*movement or change more likely to occur"*.

According to Rogers (1967), the third condition for a facilitative learning relationship is that of empathic understanding. This means that the facilitator or educator actively listens and accurately senses the feelings and personal meaning of what is being said, communicating their understanding to the learner (Rogers 1980). Accurate empathy supports the learning process as the educator shows understanding of the student's needs and reactions. Rogers (1967, p.30) suggests that in such a climate the "*likelihood of significant learning is increased"*. Rogers and Freiberg (1994, p.158) further argue that when accurate empathic understanding occurs in a learning environment "*it has a tremendously releasing effect"* which adds to the potency of the learning experience (Rogers 1967).

Several criticisms have been cited against Rogers' ideas and concepts. A first major criticism regarding Rogers' (1957, 1967, 1980) view is that his core conditions are both necessary and sufficient to bring about change. Samstag (2007) and Lazarus (2007) review the evidence to support such claims and suggest a much more tentative outcome for the three core conditions. Rather than viewing these conditions as sufficient and necessary, they suggest they are facilitative and complementary to other forms of intervention. Samstag (2007, p.297) further claims that Rogers ceased to recognise the complexity of the relationship itself, which "*encompasses a nuanced process that involves the moment-to-moment interactions"*. The sufficiency of the person-centred approach to bring about change is also questioned by Feltham (2010) who implies that other 'nudges' or techniques are needed. He queries whether the person always has the necessary power to change.

Brian Thorne (1992) offers a comprehensive review of the criticisms of Rogers' person-centred approach. While primarily relating to psychotherapy these criticisms also apply to the learning theories posited by Rogers (1967, 1980 and with Freiberg, 1994). As one of the most influential figures in twentieth century psychotherapy, Rogers was also perceived a threat to the 'expert' of the psychotherapist (Thorne 1992). He viewed both therapist and client as equal partners in the therapeutic relationship and as such attempted to flatten the hierarchy within the 'therapy'. Roger's belief and trust in humans as 'growth orientated' was also seen in stark contrast to Freud's pessimistic view of human nature. Other criticisms are made from Christian writers too, who deemed Roger's view as a rejection of God and lacking acknowledgement of the theological doctrine of 'original sin' (Thorne 1992, p. 68). Transferring this type

of flat hierarchical structure in a learning setting may also be threatening for educators seeking greater power.

Furthermore, Rollo May (1982) suggests that Roger's view of humans was too optimistic and lacked any significant response to the concept of evil in people and their actions (cited in Hoffman, 2009). Therefore, some writers deem Roger's person-centred approach as inadequate to confront or challenge acts of evil or aggression (May 1982; Feltham 2010). Martin Buber, whose theories on dialogue will be examined elsewhere, held a similar humanist view to Rogers. However, in a notable dialogue with Rogers in 1957, Buber disagreed with some of his perspectives, perceiving them as supporting a subordinate relationship rather than one of equals. Buber therefore believed the power imbalance in the relationship was not sufficiently acknowledged by Rogers (Cissna and Anderson 1994). While broadly supportive of Rogers, Mark Smith (2004) cautions youth workers against the draw to the Rogerian approach because of its 'person centeredness' rather than focussing upon the relationship 'between' the worker and the young person. He states, "*a focus on the other rather than on what lies between us could lead away from the relational into a rather selfish individualism"* (Smith, 2004 p.3). While this statement is contested, it concurs with how Buber (1957, cited Cissna and Anderson 1994) views the concepts and practice posited by Rogers. Certainly, within a youth work context these criticisms are relevant, and questions remain as to how young people are viewed, treated and challenged. Youth work exists within some austere environments where challenging behaviour is exhibited by young people and it is therefore difficult to know if the relationship with its threefold emphasis is sufficient and challenging enough to bring about change.

While research and academic literature exists, which questions the potential of the person-centred approach, Carl Rogers and associated proponents are convinced of the evidence to sustain his perspective. Rogers and Freiberg (1994, p.161) suggest that the evidence to support the person-centred approach within learning environments seems irrefutable. The basic premise that building a relationship has beneficial outcomes is reinforced throughout their research from both psychotherapeutic and learning settings. Although writing from a counselling and therapeutic context, Natiello (2001, p.25) cites research from Duncan (1997) that suggests the relationship between the client and the therapist builds a *"positive outcome"*. She further reports findings of Lambert (reviewed by Miller et al. 1995, cited in Natiello 2001, p.29) which quantifies the effect of the therapeutic relationship as contributing a "*hefty 30% to the outcome in psychotherapy"*. Although youth work is neither therapy nor counselling, these findings add considerable weight to the power and significance of building relationships within informal learning settings.

Specifically examining the person-centred approach, research by Kirschenbaum and Jourdan (2005) suggests that Rogers' ideas are still deemed as highly influential and significant within the psychotherapeutic community and educational contexts. They also report evidence, in 2005, of a revival in the person-centred approach by scholars and practitioners (ibid p. 48). Furthermore, the three core conditions, while not always deemed necessary and sufficient to bring about change, are nonetheless viewed as facilitative (Gelso and Carter 1985 cited in Kirschenbaum and Jourdan 2005; O'Hara, 2003). Even among critics such as Lazarus (2007, p.254) there is recognition that *"high levels of rapport may facilitate many constructive changes".*

In the context of education, several studies show how the person-centred approach increases learning outcomes for students (Aspey 1965, Rogers 1967 and Hoy et al. 1991 cited in Rogers and Freiberg 1994, p.161-162). Others highlight the positive effects of this more indirect and relational teaching method in support of learning (Aspey and Roebuck 1977). Additionally, Skinner and Belmont (1993 cited in Cornelius-White 2007, p.133) studied the effects of reciprocity in the learning relationship, suggesting increased student participation and engagement. Moreover Bohart & Tallman (1999, cited O'Hara 2003, p.76) suggest that empathy is the "*gold standard for effective facilitation in any growth-focused relationship"*. In a comprehensive review and meta-analysis of the literature regarding the impact of learner centred teacher-student relationships, Jeffrey Cornelius-White (2007) outlines the positive effect that a Rogerian type relationship has on both the learner and the learning. His analysis of more than 1,000 articles including 119 studies concluded that the Rogerian principles of "*positive relationships, non-directivity, empathy, warmth, and encouraging thinking and learning are the specific teacher variables that are above average compared with other educational innovations"* (ibid., p.134). While Rogers is not the only theorist or practitioner to offer a perspective on relationship building his framework offers youth work a philosophical perspective. His humanist approach resonates with youth work and has been promoted in the training context (Henry et al. 2010).

Implications for Youth Work Practice

Carl Rogers' learner/person centred approach is relevant to the context of youth work. While the approach does have its critics (May 1982; Smith, 2004; Lazarus 2007) there is no doubting that the Rogerian emphasis on empathic, congruent and accepting relationships supports learning, growth and change in the lives of

young people. Henry et al. (2010) identify how Rogers' core conditions should form the basis for the relationship which youth workers create with young people. They emphasise the high level of interpersonal skills, knowledge and self-awareness needed to develop such a person-centred relationship. Elsewhere, Gharabaghi (2008) also stresses the importance of relationships in working with young people. He states, *"relationships are a state of being rather than a tool to be used or side-lined as the practitioner saw fit"* (Gharabaghi 2008, p.212). This humanistic focus and emphasis on 'being' rather than doing is also central to Carl Rogers' philosophy.

Furthermore Gharabaghi (2008) addresses the complex issue of power within and between the relationships. While there is a desire to tip the power balance in the young person's favour within the youth work relationship (Davies 2005; Henry et al. 2010) Gharabaghi (2008) controversially suggests that relationships do not transcend power imbalances. These power imbalances, he states, are constantly reinforced by institutional dynamics, culture, convention, differences in language and social expectations (ibid., p.219). The dissonance between the worker and the young person, he argues, is so great that relationship skills are needed to bridge the divide and reduce the power imbalance. These relationship skills Gharabaghi (2008) suggests should change the emphasis away from 'relationship-based' work that is potentially oppressive to a focus on relational work which is dynamic, and process orientated. He states,

> "*within this (relational) construction of 'relationship', the concept of relationship is stripped of its potentially oppressive features related to loyalty, commitment and expectations, and re-articulated through its more*

> *interactive and momentary features of connectedness and being together in the moment"* (ibid., p. 233).

Whilst vague on the specific skills necessary for this relational approach, Gharabaghi (2008) also suggests that this relational process is informed by critical thinking and self-challenge and is both reflective and reflexive. These are similar ingredients to the perspective of Henry et al. (2010) who endorse a range knowledge, skills and values which support the relationship building in a youth work context. These perspectives move away from a traditionally held view that building relationships is innate (Gharabaghi 2008, p. 231) and something that *"just happens",* but rather, they identify the complexity and high levels of competence needed for such a process. These competencies and skills are not innate but stem from the way of being which is enshrined in Rogers' (1967, 1980) person centred approach to learning. This way of being places respect, congruence and empathy at the centre, prizing the individual and building a relationship which encourages learning.

As with Rogers (1980), but writing specifically from a youth work context, Brendtro and Ness (1983, p.17) view the quality of human relationships as the *"most powerful determining factor of successful programmes"* with young people. In addition, they suggest that it is not only the relationship with the 'worker' that is important but also those with peers and the relationships that are observed by the young person (Brendtro and Ness 1983; Brendtro and Mitchel 2010). Furthermore Brendtro et al., (2002) liken relationship building to a form of technology. They suggest this 'relationship technology' involves a set of ten concepts which underpin the practice of building relationships. The ten concepts are as follows: Relationship is an action not a feeling; Crisis is an opportunity;

Loving the unlovable; Disengaging from conflict cycles; Earning trust of youth; Relationship building is an endurance event; Conducting therapy on the hoof; Respect begets respect; Teaching joy, and The invitation to belong (Brendtro et al., 2002, p. 75-85). Though all ten of the concepts have merit, several are salient across the literature reviewed in this section. The initial premise that relationships are about actions and not feelings is a constant vein running through the youth work literature. This resonates with the idea that interpersonal skills are necessary for the process of relationship building which facilitates learning and growth (Rogers 1980; Gharabaghi 2008; Sapin 2009; Henry et al. 2010). Therefore, relationship building is not a passive pursuit but necessitates "*specific helping behaviours that created powerful change"* (Fromm 1957 cited in Brendtro et al., 2002, p.76). Inherent within the ten relationship building concepts are principles and values such as respect, empathy, love, trust and care for young people. While these values, principles and perspectives are akin to those in the 'person centred approach' of Rogers (1967, 1980 and Rogers and Freiberg 1994) there are subtle distinctions. Larry Brendtro's perspective is more action orientated while Rogers' emphasises the notion of being. While it may be viewed as merely a semantic difference, this esoteric distinction represents a subtle dichotomy which exists across youth work thinking and literature. Of these two focuses, Rogers emphasises the what while Brendtro the why. These distinctions are evident in the juxtapositions of non-directive approaches versus those focussing on action and process orientated practice in contrast to that which centres on the product or outcome.

Regardless of emphasis, there is strong agreement across the literature that building relationships is an intrinsic aspect of youth work. Simply stated, *"just one*

positive connection with an adult can make a difference" (Brendtro and Larson 2006, p.58). Whether this is a sufficient goal of relationship building is a question that remains. Research questions will emanate that explore the dichotomies and perceptions which youth workers have regarding the place of 'relationships' and the building thereof within their practice.

In this section of the literature review, relationship building has been explored and examined from a range of perspectives. Upon examination of the British and Irish writing on youth work, prodigious emphasis is placed on forming trusting, voluntary relationships with young people that enables learning. Furthermore, critical exploration of the Rogerian theoretical framework for building person centred relationships, on balance, shows international support for such an approach. Then finally, the implications for practice and the emphases of the nature of the relationship, and the rationale for building relationships, were discussed.

Reflecting upon the literature, relationships that bring about change with young people is a prominent theme. This presupposition emanates from the array of cited empirical research which supports the premise (Rogers and Freiberg 1994; Brendtro et al., 2002; Gharabaghi 2008). However, beyond this research is a deep belief that relationship has power to change. Brendtro et al., (2005, p.48) exclaim *that "it is the strength of human bonds . . . not the severity of punishment that preserves human order"*. Beyond this thinking is a premise in youth work that relationship is an aid to learning. Tiffany (2001, p.103) suggests that this type of learning should take place in a *"dialogue-centred relationship"*. It is therefore from this standpoint that the concepts of conversation and dialogue necessitate further exploration.

Chapter Four: Conversation and Dialogue

While the idea of conversation may seem basic to a lay person, there is however a strand of youth work thinking and practice which has pronounced emphasis upon the concept. Jeffs and Smith (2005, 2010) have argued that conversation, while sometimes undervalued, is a central aspect to the work of informal educators (youth workers). Mary Wolfe (2001) similarly stresses the importance of conversation in informal learning, while Sapin (2009) suggests it is the mainstay of youth work. While its significance is clear it is necessary to explore what is meant by conversation and indeed dialogue in the youth work context before examining the theoretical concepts and ideas underpinning the activity.

Conversation: Underlying Principles and Etymology

The theoretical ideas behind conversation are firmly placed within the broader academic discipline of sociolinguistics (Wardhaugh 2006). In this context, the deconstruction of language is interrogated and studied from various perspectives. However, as the interest of this study is to investigate how a process such as conversation is utilised by youth workers and serves the purpose of youth work, it therefore necessitates a narrower focus.

Within sociolinguistics, conversation is viewed as primarily a social activity (Wardhaugh 1985). As such it involves sophisticated levels of communication (Jeffs and Smith 2005) which are governed by unwritten rules and principles (Grice 1975; Wardhaugh 1985; Wolfe 2001). Wardhaugh (1985) argues that these are not rigid guides and rules as characterised by natural science or mathematical systems. Rather, there is an ebb and flow to conversation that demands the adherence to certain principles of cooperation and etiquette. Wardhaugh (1985, p.63) states, "*such principles enable us to exhibit a basic*

tolerance toward and cooperation with others, which is the basis of all social bonding and all social behaviour". Furthermore, Grice (1975) maintains that this 'cooperative principle' is the overriding principle in all conversation. Grice lists four maxims that are intrinsic to the cooperative principle. These maxims relate to quantity, quality, relation and manner. 'Quantity' refers to the amount of necessary information shared within an interaction, 'quality' involves the truthfulness of the words used, and 'relation' denotes the relevance of the material used within the conversation. Finally, 'manner' requires you to *"avoid obscurity of expression and ambiguity"* (cited Wardhaugh 2006, p.291).

Sincerity, Wardhaugh (1985) suggests is the basic concept underpinning Grice's maxims. As a value and principle, sincerity is core to youth work and helps to establish trust with the young person. Being truthful and genuine are cited as some of the underpinning core values of youth work (Jeffs and Smith 2005; Banks 2010; Jeffs and Smith 2010). However, sensitivity is required in relaying truthfulness to potentially challenging young people. Heather Smith (2010) articulates this well in citing an example from youth work practice. She depicts a youth work scenario with young men who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. She does not advocate avoiding the truth about their behaviour. In her example of practice, she writes of how she gently and tactfully confronted them about their actions while building a relationship with them through conversation. She, along with Jeffs & Smith (2005), states the significance of trusting in conversation within the practice of youth work. This 'trusting' allows for a process that is discursive rather than judgemental and involves sensitive confrontation rather than confrontation that serves to humiliate (Smith H. ,

2010). Grice's (1975) 'cooperative principle' is important in everyday conversation but in a youth work setting it seems essential.

The terms conversation and dialogue are usually considered as synonymous. However, in exploring their etymology, Baker et al., (2005) draw some distinction between the two words. Dialogue, they suggest has Greek origins and refers to *"opposing voices in search of truth"* while conversation embraces more *"collaborative, contextual interactions"* (Baker et al., 2005, p.414). However, Bohm (1991) makes the dissimilar distinction between dialogue and discussion, framing dialogue as the more open term. Moreover, the word conversation has Latin roots, and although the exact translation is contested, the definition relates to the verb 'vertere' which means to turn, and 'con' meaning with (Wolfe 2001). Therefore, Wolfe (2001, p.130) suggests that conversation is about turning around *"our ideas and experiences with each other"*, thus placing conversation and dialogue within a framework of learning. While Wardhaugh (1985) similarly acknowledges that conversation can be utilised within a learning context, he suggests that the rules differ from everyday informal interaction, as in this context its structure and purpose are different.

While the words conversation, discussion, discourse and dialogue are nuanced in their meaning in this study they are explored synonymously. Various authors emphasise different words depending on their perspectives and understanding. Although the starting point in the youth work literature pertains to conversation the other words resonate and explicate the practice involved in such processes.

Differing Aspects of Conversation

In exploring an appreciation of the nature of conversation within a youth work context, Jeffs and Smith (2005, p.29) distinguish between mere talk and

conversation. They highlight seven differing aspects of conversation. Primarily, they suggest it is a social activity which is a reciprocal process. As a social activity, conversation involves cooperation, giving each other 'room' to talk and thinking of the others' feelings and experiences. Secondly, conversation is a two-way process where it is marked by dialogue and agendas are agreed. Thirdly, Jeffs and Smith (2005) suggest that conversation necessitates an immediate response. This immediacy creates a fluidity that sometimes necessitates tolerance within the discourse while making a response in the 'heat of the moment'. While conversation is an everyday action the fourth dimension recognises that it is a *"sophisticated activity"* (ibid., p.29). The sophistication comes from the multi-faceted aspect of conversation such as reading body language, understanding semantics and using communication skills appropriately. Similarly, Wolfe (2001, p.126) recognises that it is difficult to account for the diverse range of interactions in a simple label such as 'conversation'.

The fifth aspect noted by Jeffs and Smith (2005, p.30) is that conversation entails *"certain commitments"* to truthfulness, trust and openness. These commitments show esteem to the 'other' and build in trust, establishing rapport between the educator and the young person. Interpretation is the sixth aspect of conversation. Here, there is an acknowledgement that conversation requires a high level of skill and necessitates drawing upon deeper knowledge of the person and their context. Finally, conversation is a complex activity (Wolfe 2001; Jeffs and Smith 2005; Smith 2010). It presupposes a certain level of skills, knowledge and insight which should lead to a freer exchange, thus supporting the educational process of youth work.

Equally, conversation could be thought of as a simple activity, that is natural, engaged with by all and an unremarkable everyday feat. However, as a process within a learning context of youth work it is thought to be a sophisticated, 'two-way', educative activity. Nonetheless to claim that conversation is a key process within youth work without examining what it is trying to achieve reduces its significance to banality. Conversation in the context of youth work therefore requires further examination.

Conversation in Youth Work Practice

Much has been written about the practice of conversation within a youth work context (Wolfe 2001; Batsleer 2008; Sapin 2009; Smith 2010) with various assertions about its significance. In a youth work context conversation is deemed to be more than 'chit chat' and banter (Jeffs and Smith 2005; Williamson 2005; Batsleer 2008; Ord 2016a), although youth work involves an element of fun. Batsleer (2008) claims that community youth work is about conversation and dialogue which enables young people to learn in informal contexts. This assertion places conversation as a fundamental process within youth work. Sapin (2009) identifies the communication skills involved in conversation, highlighting listening, allowing space for the 'other' to speak and 'staying with' what is being said by the young person. While Wolfe (2001) espouses similar techniques and skills to be utilised in the process of conversation, she makes even stronger connections between conversation and learning. Conversation, she states, enables a freedom to occur which allows *"space for new thinking"* (Wolfe 2001, p.129). This new thinking promotes learning and the taking on of new ideas. Jeffs and Smith (2005) illustrate how conversation is used in informal education using a five-stage model of engagement. The process of informal education (synonymously youth work) involves the worker assessing the

situation to ascertain what might be happening and the necessary role of the worker. Subsequently, the worker engages in conversation, which in turn raises questions and necessitates a degree of discernment about any necessary action, thus enabling the worker to develop a response. Youth work, they state is *"driven by conversation"* (Jeffs and Smith 2005, p.78). Whilst this may be a formulaic approach to youth work, their five stage model places conversation at the centre of the informal education process. Consequently, learning is deemed to be an outcome of the practice.

However, the assertion that conversation assists in the learning process is not the only claim within the youth work literature. Batsleer (2008) argues that as conversation is a two-way process it has the potential to empower young people. Through conversation, collaborative investigation and asking questions she argues, young people may begin to challenge their circumstances to bring about change. She further argues that this *"is the tradition of democratic, political education"* (ibid., p.9). As such, empowerment refers to the power or lack thereof experienced by the young person and the process whereby the youth worker enables them to take power. However, Jeffs and Smith (2005, p.21) suggest this is a potentially anti-liberatory activity, as at worst it *"encourages dependency of the 'empowered' on the 'empowerer'"*. While power within a youth work context will be addressed elsewhere in this review of literature, it is worth noting its relation to the practice of conversation.

Seal and Harris (2014, p.90) go further, in citing Baizermann (1989), they suggest that a youth work conversation is an educational encounter. As such they assert the weaknesses of the common sense understanding of Jeffs and Smith (2005). Youth work conversations are not ordinary conversations but

rather *"it truly engages in the other, as this is how knowledge is created"* (Seal and Harris 2014, p.110). In their eyes, the relational and 'jazz-like' nature of conversation creates a space for learning and reflection which is spontaneous and where the young person is not reduced to 'problems' (ibid). This free flowing and educational emphasis has purposeful aims that facilitate the other to work through difficulties and problems together.

Therefore, conversation in a youth work context is by no means a neutral activity. Implicit within the practice of conversation are values which aid to further explain why youth work endorses such an approach. Valuing the young person is a central aspect of conversation. Along with openness, Jeffs and Smith (2005) emphasise being with the person, rather than acting upon them, as fundamental ingredients. They further stress that conversation is not simply an act of communication, accentuating the need to 'trust in conversation' as a demonstration of the interest the worker has for the young person. Smith (2010, p.40) suggests that it is not merely a logistical activity but "*more an encounter of the emotions"*. Furthermore, Wolfe (2001) recognises that conversation can be entered freely and is voluntary in nature.

The parlance around conversation within the youth work literature focuses on three main elements. Firstly, although to a lesser degree than the other two, the communication skills and techniques necessary to engage with young people are examined (Sapin 2009; Smith 2010). Secondly, the principles and values underpinning the practice of conversation (Wolfe 2001; Jeffs and Smith 2005) are woven throughout the literature. The third major focus and having greatest emphasis in the literature is the purpose of conversation within the practice of youth work, namely education and learning (Wolfe 2001; Jeffs and Smith 2005;

Williamson 2005; Batsleer 2008). Whether the *"unpredictable developing and flourishing"* (Wolfe 2001, p. 136) that can occur because of conversation or the emancipatory empowerment referred to by Batsleer (2008), education and learning underpin much of what is written about conversation within the youth work literature. However, while these three emphases illustrate some of the youth work thinking, further exploration is necessary to examine the theoretical and philosophical ideas underpinning the practice.

As much has been written about the actual skills employed in conversation, and the focus of this study is on the purpose of youth work, the following section therefore places less emphasis on these practice elements. Rather, the theory and philosophy around conversation regarding the principles and rules governing such practice is explored. Alongside this the literature review focuses on how conversation and dialogue contribute to education and learning. These two aspects of conversation form the basis for understanding why the practice is of interest to youth workers and how it relates to the purpose of youth work.

Conversation and Learning: Underpinning Philosophies

Locating the social activity of conversation and dialogue within a context of learning helps in identifying why the process may be of interest to youth work. Across the youth work literature, it is understood that conversation creates a more equal space between the young person and the youth worker. It is a catalyst for empowerment and seeks to address the power differential between many professional relationships with young people, and it is also the basis for social interaction. However, youth work focuses on the conversation and dialogue because of the assumptions and suppositions about learning, education, community and change that are inherent within the process.

While the practice of dialogue can be traced back to Socrates and Plato (Nightingale 2000; Young 2010; Cooper et al., 2013), more contemporary application of the concept has been advanced. Cooper et al., (2013) contend that the concept of dialogue has not only underpinned key developments in psychotherapy (the discipline from which they are writing) but also the areas of education, community development, and social transformation. They cite Buber (1947), Freire (1973), Bakhtin (1981), and Habermas (1984) respectively for their contributions to the thinking and development of conversation and dialogue. Furthermore, others write about dialogue from the related disciplines of transformative learning (Mezirow 2003; Gunnlaugson 2007b), business and organisational learning (Senge 1990; Scharmer 2001) and political theory (Habermas 1984, 1987, 1990). These ideas and concepts serve in understanding the relationship between dialogue and its relationship with the purpose of youth work, thus they necessitate further exploration.

The concept and practice of dialogue as outlined by the Austrian existential theologian and philosopher, Martin Buber (1947, 1970) has been cited as having a significant influence within the fields of informal education (Smith 2001b) and psychotherapy (Freidman 2002, Cooper et al., 2013). Describing genuine dialogue, Buber (1947, p.37) states

> "*each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them"*.

Buber's' perspective not only emphasises the esteem one should have for the 'other' but goes further in suggesting that there must also be an openness to

change oneself (Cooper et al., 2013). His philosophical idea in conversation and dialogue is to find the 'space between' rather than contending that either party has the truth. In his seminal work, 'I and Thou', Buber (1970) is concerned about authentic existence rather than merely existing with the other (Friedman 2002). The quality of relationship between those in dialogue is stressed rather than the substance or topic of the conversation. The focus of Buberian dialogue is therefore marked by both – receptivity; openness to the other and expressivity; the willingness of both parties to authentically share of themselves (Cooper et al., 2013). These aspirations for dialogue resonate with the various characteristics of conversation outlined by Wolfe (2001), Jeffs and Smith (2005), Smith (2010). Regarding his perspective on the educative role of dialogue, Smith (2001b, p.2) further states,

> *"Martin Buber believed, that real educators teach most successfully when they are not consciously trying to teach at all, but when they act spontaneously out of their own life".*

Aligned to the ideas of Martin Buber, the Russian educationalist and philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) has been associated with the concept and practice of dialogue within a context of learning and education (Hamston, 2006; White, 2009; Matusov, 2011; Cooper et al., 2013). Bakhtin's (1981) view on dialogue involved the rejection of a monologic world view where knowledge or truth is transmitted from the 'knowing' to the 'unknowing' (in Cooper et al., 2013). Bakhtin (1984, p.110) suggests that 'truth' is not found in the individual but rather *"it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction"*. Furthermore, he believed that even in learning science there is always an interplay between the subjective and the objective and as

such it is dialogical (Bakhtin 1986). This suggests that knowledge is somewhat subjective in nature and that through dialogue a fuller understanding can be achieved. Furthermore, Bakhtin's perspective focuses on the internal dialogue of both speaker and the listener while the discourse is taking place. These internal voices help to create new understanding in each party as the dialogue develops. As Bakhtin (1981, p.282) states, the speaker *"breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on alien territory, against his, the listener's apperceptive background"*. In this learning context, new discoveries about the other and/or a subject are realised. Matusov (2011, p.115) expands upon Bakhtins' ideas on dialogue within a formal educational context, stating,

> *"The goal of education is not to make students have the same understanding as the teacher, but rather to engage them in historically valuable discourses, to become familiar with historically, culturally, and socially important voices, to learn how to address these voices, and to develop responsible replies to them without an expectation of an agreement or an emerging consensus".*

This reference suggests a collaborative approach to learning rather than one which is traditionally didactic and authoritarian. Learning in this context is wrought through consensus and through a democratic process. While little reference is made to Bakhtin in the youth work literature, his philosophical standpoint is compatible with youth work thinking on dialogue and conversation. In one rare reference to Bakhtin's dialogical philosophy, Edginton & Randall (2005) write of the necessary inclusion of young people in programme planning for youth work. This basic application, while useful, does an injustice to the depth

of Bakhtin's philosophy and undermines the potential of his theory within a youth work context.

Conversely, Paulo Freire (1921-1997), a 20th century educationalist is cited by many youth work writers within the British and Irish context regarding his conceptualisation of dialogue (see Wolfe 2001; Jeffs and Smith 2005; Batsleer 2008; Beck and Purcell 2010; Buckroth and Parkin 2010; Young 2010). Underlying the Freirean concept of dialogue is a critique of education which is perceived as exploitative and disempowering. Freire (1970, 1997, 2007) contends that in a learning context, people should not be treated as receptacles that are to be filled through a process of education. He refers to this notion as 'banking' (Freire 1970; Smith 2002). Dialogue, Freire (1970) states is an existential necessity, which requires humans to encounter one another, not in hierarchical relationships but as co-learners. Additionally, he suggests seven axioms for dialogue to include 'faith in others', 'mutual trust', 'humility' and 'love for the world and people' (ibid.). Integral to these maxims are not only values but ontological concepts and beliefs about the nature of existence and inequality. Freire (1970, p.70) suggests a radical rethinking of how the world is viewed, stating that dialogue *"is an act of creation: it must not serve as a crafty instrument of domination of one person by another"*. He further advocates a goal of dialogue as engendering critical thinking and posits that *"only dialogue that requires critical thinking is also capable of generating critical thinking"* (ibid., p.74).

Dialogue, within the Freirean tradition has therefore a two-fold emphasis. Firstly, it aims to produce a greater critical awareness of the 'undesirable ways' in which the participants are affected by their circumstances or culture (Cooper et al.,

2013, p.79). Freire (2007, p.40) refers to this process as the development of critical consciousness whereby, *"critical understanding leads to critical action"*. Dialogue is therefore concerned with enabling people to take charge of their lives and do something about their realities. Rather than tell the learner what to learn the emphasis is placed upon facilitating them to take power to change their world. Balagopalan (2011) names this process as emancipation and liberation.

Secondly, Freire's concept of dialogue emphasises the valued contribution of both the educator and the participant in the learning process. This participatory approach, as with Buber (1947, 1970) and Bakhtin (1981, 1984), esteems both parties and is intended to create a much less hierarchical learning environment. Freire (1970) suggests that educational ventures often fail when educators are not fully engaged with those whom the programme is directed. Therefore, the purpose of dialogue is to emancipate in a way that emphasises equality of educator and participant. This emphasis on power sharing is also endemic within youth work and illustrates how the process of conversation and dialogue have purpose.

Freire is often written about in superlative terms, with little critique of his philosophy or ideals. However, selected writers suggest that Freire overemphasises the equality that can be achieved through dialogue, and therefore ceases to recognise the power imbalances which are inherent within an educational relationship (Smith 2002; Cooper et al., 2013). Also, Smith (2002, p.2) intimates that the binary nature of Freire's argument produces an 'either/or' approach; that is, society separated into the powerful and the oppressed thus creating a simplistic political analysis. Furthermore, as Freire practised his

pedagogical ideas within a more formal context, Torres (1993) questions it's transferability to an informal educational setting, such as youth work.

While Freire's claims about dialogue are contested, nonetheless, his theoretical perspective has been embraced within a youth work context (Wolfe 2001; Batsleer 2008; Buckroth and Parkin 2010; Young 2010). His views on dialogue and conversation are cited as central processes across youth work practice (Jeffs and Smith 2005; Beck and Purcell 2010; Jeffs 2011). Whether in a therapeutic or educational relationship, the type of dialogue posited by Buber, Bakhtin and Freire, is at odds with traditional notions of hierarchy where the power often lies with the 'expert' psychotherapist or educator. This type of dialogue, with both parties open to change and when the relationship is marked by authenticity, may not be unique to youth work but is certainly desired.

Elsewhere, an array of terms such as critical discourse (Mezirow 1981 & 2003) generative dialogue (Gunnlaugson 2007a, 2007b) and communicative discourse/action (Habermas 1984), have also been utilised to describe and analyse how the process of conversation and dialogue are used in learning contexts. According to Kitchenham (2008), the concept and practice of transformative learning developed by Jack Mezirow (1927 -2014) has been heavily influenced by the theories of dialogue and communication espoused by Freire (1970) and Habermas (1984). Transformative learning is defined as a depth in structural shift of basic premises of 'thought, feelings, and actions' (Transformative Learning Centre, 2004 cited Kitchenham 2008). Mezirow (1981) posits that the significant process by which transformation is achieved is critical discourse, whereby, engaging the other in a dialogue involves an "*assessment of beliefs, feelings, and values"* (Mezirow 2003, p.60). This leads to deeper critical

reflection and increased self-awareness. Critical discourse of this nature involves the employment of skills such as *"having an open mind, learning to listen empathetically, 'bracketing' premature judgment, and seeking common ground"* (ibid., p. 60) As such the focus of this critical discourse is agreement, rather than the acquisition of knowledge or testing if something is true. Although writing from an adult learning perspective, Mezirow (1981 & 2003) clearly shares goals with those of youth work (for example Smith, 2001b; Young 2006, 2010; Beck and Purcell 2010). However, the transformative process of which Mezirow writes, demands a high level of honesty and openness which may not always be achieved in an adult/young person relationship due to an inherent power differential.

While transformative learning has evolved since its inception, as Kitchenham (2008) and Mezirow (1981 & 2003) suggest, the central emphasis of critical discourse and reflection have remained core. Nonetheless, Gunnlaugson (2007b) questions whether Mezirow's conceptualisation and practice of critical discourse recognises the complex nature of conversation and dialogue involved to produce the type of transformation that is claimed. Therefore, generative dialogue is offered as an alternative process (Gunglaugson 2007b). Generative dialogue is presented as a fourth distinct phase in a continuum of communication. Scharmer's (2001) model names these phases as logic fields in which the conversation moves from polite discussion (i.e. talking nice), to debate (i.e. tough talk) towards a more open 'reflective dialogue' to form a collective intelligence in the form of 'generative dialogue'. Within each logic field the conversation develops in complexity, unearthing differing layers of consciousness in the participants and culminates in a discourse which is focused

on fresh ways of thinking and being, thus generating new learning. Although formulaic, this type of complex process is evident in conversations within a youth work context.

Finally, although the writings of Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929) will be discussed elsewhere in this literature review it is important to highlight this German philosopher's contribution to the concept and practice of dialogue and discourse within a learning context. According to Warren (1995) a basic, yet contested premise of Habermas's (1984, 1987) philosophy of communication is that "*we are always motivated towards consensus in speech"* (Warren 1995, p.180). In reviewing the literature of Habermas's contribution to education, Ewert (1991, p.364) adds a further dimension by asserting that all the writers whom he reviewed accept that the Habermasian ideal assumes that true discourse should be free from constraint. Habermas (1984) further claims that communication produces non-distorted knowledge when several conditions are adhered to. These conditions are summarised as follows –

> *"(a) everyone who is involved in a given activity is part of the discussion to coordinate that activity, (b) status is disregarded, (c) personal interests do not intervene, and (d) participants in the discussion decide as peers using norms of rationality"* (Cooper et al., 2013, p.80).

Habermas (1984) acknowledges this is a sophisticated form of dialogue that necessitates a high degree of maturity on behalf of the participants to create open and honest discourse. This open and honest discourse leading to new knowledge and understanding is a high aspiration within much of the writing on dialogue (See also Buber 1947; Freire 1970, 1995; Bakhtin 1984). Moreover,

Habermas (1984, 1987) extends the reach of dialogue even further to encompass social transformation at a macro level.

Dialogue and Conversation: Summary and Critique

Within this section I have reviewed a range of literature pertaining to the theme of conversation, dialogue and discourse. The initial focus of the literature emanates from youth work practice and subsequently, 'conversation' through a lens of sociolinguistics and the etymology of the terms were discussed. Ultimately and most crucially the connection to learning and the underpinning philosophies were examined and reviewed. Evidently, dialogue is viewed in several ways. As a form of communication, dialogue may refer to ordinary social exchange and basic conversation (Wardhaugh 1985, 2006, see Cooper et al., 2013). Secondly, it can be viewed as a more ontological experience thus reflecting the essence of human existence (see Bakhtin 1984, Buber 1947). Dialogue from this perspective recognises the intertwined social relationships of humans and their need for each other. However, in this literature review, the primary focus on dialogue revolves around the transformative and educational claims made by the proponents of the theories. From this theoretical standpoint dialogue is firstly characterised by depth of respect for the other, secondly, non-authoritarian equality between the participants and thirdly, openness which enables both parties to change. Whether at societal, community or individual levels, the purpose of transformative dialogue is perceived as a process for development, growth and positive change (Cooper et al., 2013) across the range of traditions and perspectives reviewed.

Conversation, in its various guises is embraced across the community youth work literature, and the theoretical underpinnings have an historical and

philosophical depth and rigour. However, a few criticisms and questions have been cited with regard to its practice. The concerns primarily relate to the claims of dialogue and conversation and whether they have validity.

A strong emphasis throughout the literature is the equality between participants in dialogue. It is questionable whether the level of mutuality or intersubjectivity claimed in the process of dialogue and conversation can really exist in a therapeutic or educational relationship. In the case of youth work there is a power imbalance between the young person and the youth worker. While many writers seek to address this issue (Davies 2005; Batsleer 2008; Jeffs and Smith 2010; Smith 2010) a question remains about the level of true power sharing and mutuality involved in the dialogical process. However, in a preliminary study examining the client and therapist relationship, Cooper (2012) found that the perception of dialogical connection between participants was high. It would therefore be of interest to see how the youth workers in this study examine their power in relation to the dialogues and conversations they have with young people. Furthermore, how do youth workers, as Davies (2005) states, tip the power in favour of the young person to create more mutual and equal conversations?

A second consideration regards the transformative assertions of conversation and dialogue. Transformative learning as outlined by Mezirow (1981, 2003) utilises dialogue as a primary process within its practice. Yet, Kuchukadin and Cranton (2013) question certain aspects of transformative learning, citing the Jungian premises of the extra rational perspective and the subjective nature of the learning gained as problematic. If these two concerns have merit, it is therefore necessary to examine some of the basic assumptions about the

transformative learning that is thought to be achieved through dialogue in youth work. The nature of the transformation that youth workers want to see is ambiguous (Sercombe 2010), and questions remain about its relationship to dialogue. The place of conversation in youth work is assumed yet it is not always clear what transformation is being sought.

While Martin Buber (1947) draws a clear distinction between monologue (one-way communication) and dialogue, it is uncertain if such clarity transpires. Buber sees little place for monological communication, dismissing the practice as egocentric and lacking in reciprocity. A third issue therefore exists regarding the relationship between monologue and dialogue. Cooper et al., (2013, p.53) question whether it is possible to "*remain consistently in dialogue"*, as there is the need to give advice, add perspective or inform the other. If conversation is an educational process for youth workers to engage in consistently, it is necessary to explore whether there is a place for monological communication. Therefore, several issues arise. Whether youth workers should ever engage in one-way communication (monologue) or always communicate dialogically is a central issue. Also, youth workers need to evaluate the relationship between monologue and dialogue.

A final consideration regarding dialogue concerns the lack of relativity or spectrum within the concept and process. Dialogue is referred to in the literature as a process or phenomenon and as such there is little differentiation between the varying forms or levels of dialogue and conversation. Buber, Bakhtin, Freire, Mezirow and Habermas write about dialogue in similar ways, yet the contexts are different. Similarly, there is a continuum of conversation, from basic banter (Smith 2010; Ord 2016a) to the generative and purposive dialogue as posited by

Gunnlaugson (2007a, 2007b). Therefore, questions about the use of dialogue in various contexts may be pertinent and posing the ideas of continuums within a youth work context may be relevant.

The literature on conversation and dialogue illustrates a rich vein of thinking within the last century and shows how such processes might add to the theoretical basis for youth work. While there is evidence in the literature for such assumptions, an intention within this research is to scrutinise the youth work parlance and epistemology to assess how the concept is understood by practitioners and how they suggest it works out in their practice.

The literature reviewed offers the youth worker a historical and theoretical framework for understanding the purpose of conversation and dialogue as a youth work process. However, as Mark Smith (2001b, p.2) suggests,

> "*Conversation and dialogue are not simply the means that educators and animators use, but are also what educators and animators should seek to cultivate in local life. They may be approached as relationships to enter rather than simply as methods".*

Building or cultivating relationships is a primary focus of youth work. However, conversation and dialogue are an integral aspect of these relationships and add another significant layer in understanding the purpose of youth work. As the research develops it should become clear what priority youth workers place on such a process.

Chapter Five: Participation

The previous sections of this literature review have demonstrated that the processes of building relationships along with conversation and dialogue have a strong emphasis across youth work writing. Additionally, the term participation is also perceived as a central tenet to the purpose and practice of youth work (Jeffs and Smith 2005; Young 2006; Ord 2007; Podd 2010; Fitzsimons et al., 2011). The concept, practice and process of participation in a youth work context are rooted in notions of democracy, citizenship and power. Furthermore, democratic practice is a term which the group, In Defence of Youth Work (2011), deem to be a cornerstone of youth work. Conversely, participation is also a term that is often viewed uncritically (Farthing 2012) and the policy context is such that Cooke and Kothari (2002) have deemed it to be a practice of tyranny with an almost obligatory pressure to engage young people. Participation is therefore not a neutral process and is in need of investigation. Consequently, this section will deconstruct and analyse concepts and models of participation from a youth work perspective, exploring the philosophical basis and rationale of the process.

The Parlance of Participation in Youth Work

The use of the term participation within a youth work context is well documented. However, the language relating to the term is ambiguous across the literature. McCready and Dilworth (2014, p.4) highlight the ambiguity in the vocabulary of youth participation. They suggest that words such as involvement, consultation, participation and ideas of representation and citizenship, while often used interchangeably, can vary depending upon the context. It is therefore necessary to grasp what is meant in youth work parlance by participation. There are three main emphases and meanings evident across the literature; namely - participation as taking part, participation as a voluntary principle, and thirdly,

participation as it relates to democracy and power. While the meanings are interconnected, it is important to draw some distinction between these three emphases.

At a basic level, the meaning of participation according to the Oxford English Dictionary refers to the action of taking part in something. This is sometimes the simple inferred response to participation in youth work. The Northern Ireland youth work curriculum document – *A Model for Effective Practice* (DENI 2003, p.14) places participation at its core. In so doing it acknowledges that youth work involves young people taking part in activities. However, while taking part could be viewed as sufficient in itself, the Northern Ireland Youth Work curriculum document goes further in stating that participation is also about young people having *"opportunities in line with their competence to take the initiative and share responsibilities"* (ibid., p.15). This level of engagement acknowledges that the young person should have power in making decisions which affect them. At the data collection phase of this study it will be of interest to see if participation is viewed solely as taking part or more substantively.

A second emphasis is that of voluntary participation, otherwise known as the voluntary principle (Davies 2005, 2015; Jeffs and Smith 2010), which refers to the basis for youth work, whereby young people engage on their terms and of their own accord. This youth work principle of voluntary participation is a primary emphasis within the literature and the debate around it being a distinctive characteristic of youth work is well documented (Davies 2005, 2015; Ord 2009; Jeffs and Smith 2010). Nevertheless, the use of the term in the context of participation as it relates to decision making, power sharing and democracy has the potential for confusion. While the term voluntary participation

is helpful regarding a principle for engaging young people, it does not sufficiently relate to the concepts of power and decision making that the third perspective, outlined below, denotes.

This third perspective on participation across the youth work literature relates to notions of democracy and power. The emphasis on young people possessing power in the decision-making processes which affect them has the strongest emphasis in the literature (Davies 2005; Jeffs and Smith 2005; Ord 2007). This emphasis promotes young people's involvement in democratic practice and civic action. While Podd (2010) suggests participation is a contested concept, lacking a shared definition, youth work places importance on the concept particularly as it relates to the power that the young person has within this participative process. McCready and Dilworth (2014) go further in suggesting that participation is a political and educational process whereby young people become engaged more fully in their communities, taking an active role in citizenship. This is evident not only in the youth work literature but also the policy context. This places a strong emphasis on the participation and consultation of young people in the public decisions which affect them.

Within the youth work literature, notions of power and democracy are emphasised as core elements of participation (Ord 2007; Podd 2010; Cooper 2011; McCready and Dilworth 2014). It is therefore this focus on power and democracy that is the primary emphasis within the remainder of this section of the literature review.

Participation as it Relates to Power and Democracy

Participation, Ord (2007) argues, is about power. He criticises the policy framework and youth work curriculums as having promoted 'active involvement' rather than "*equality, mutuality, joint responsibility and empowerment"* (Ord 2016a, p.69). Likewise, Fitzsimons et al., (2011) view participation as an emancipatory process which should enable young people to take power and therefore achieve more control of their lives and of the decisions which affect them. In their view the current policy emphasis focuses on targeted interventions on unemployment, risk taking behaviour and resilience. According to Cooper (2011) these approaches do not sufficiently address the needs of young people who are consequently viewed as problematic, being deficient and in need of intervention. He contends that this deficit approach lacks the necessary discourse, conversation and dialogue with young people to bring about necessary political change (ibid., p.55). In the youth work context, this political change is about enabling the young person to become more critically aware of themselves and their surroundings for them to affect change. This concept of political change has been referred to as a process of conscientization (Freire 1973; Cooper 2011).

However, this radical notion that participation brings about political change is not evident in all the youth work literature. Change in a youth work context is viewed as a contested notion with two main perspectives. According to Sercombe (2010) one perspective emphasises individual change while others understand 'agency' as the power which the person takes to affect change at a more societal and structural level. The levels of power being utilised by young people through the process of participation depends on the perspective and understanding relating to the purpose of such a process. While involvement, consultation and

participation are sometimes seen as interchangeable, Shenton (2004), Ord (2007) and McCready and Dilworth (2014) differentiate between these terms when considering the real power afforded to young people.

Fostering democracy is perceived to be a purpose of youth work and for Jeffs and Smith (2005) forms the basis for participative practice whereby young people are enabled to take varying levels of control in their youth work contexts. Conversation, they contend is the process for fostering such democracy. The aim is to create association with young people marked by equal relationships which focus on "*sharing in a common life"* (Jeffs and Smith 2005, p. 48). Their emphasis on sharing a common life stresses importance on democratically working through problems and issues together with the young person. Building relationships through a conversational process is the basis for the democracy they endorse. The emphasis is not on simple majoritarian voting arrangements but on consensual and equal decision-making processes with the young people. This will assist them in taking greater control of their lives and the issues which affect them. Furthermore, Batsleer (2008, p.146) suggests that participation is less about consultation, representation and policy making but is rooted more in "*traditions that view associationalism and mutual aid… as a buffer against totalitarianism"*. This political dimension to the purpose of participation demonstrates a critique of societal structure and the necessity of action. However, the levels of power being utilised, and the amount of political change being sought vary according to the perspective of the writer.

Furthermore, McCready and Dilworth (2014, p.5) contend that *"participation involves a set of processes, methodologies, procedures and opportunities (including support) for changing the relationship between young people and*

adults". As such, they highlight that participation is a political / educational process aligned to the concept and practice of citizenship. Whilst recognising the dangers of an uncritical approach to participation (ibid.) they outline an appreciation of the potential of such a process in bringing about social and political change.

Participation across the youth work literature emphasises ideas about power, civic responsibility and political change. However, these concepts are not always linked together in either a succinct or coherent manner. The human rights activist Sherry Arnstein gathers together these ideas in defining the concept of participation. She states that participation is,

> *"the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future … It is the strategy by which they can induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society"* (Arnstein 1969, p. 216).

While the youth work literature suggests an alignment with her definition, her implicitly radical ideas are not always apparent in practice.

Models of Participation in Youth Work

An array of models exists to demonstrate various typologies of participation processes. Arnstein (1969), Smith (1982), Westhorp (1987), Hart (1992), Rocha (1997), Shier (2001) and Wierenga (2003) offer models of participation which will be reviewed and discussed. These models are underpinned by assumptions and philosophical ideas about the purpose of participation. The parlance of

participation is inherent within these models, emphasising levels of power, types of control, civic engagement, stages of responsibility and simply taking part.

According to Cooper (2011, p.46) the most common approach to conceptualising participation is based upon the influential typology of citizen participation as presented by Arnstein. This model of participation, initially published in a journal for planning, is rooted in the civil rights movement of 1960s America. Arnstein's (1969) view

of participation epitomised the existing power relations of that political context. Her typology, represented in a linear form as an eight-rung ladder (Fig 5.1), shows the varying degrees of power which citizens potentially experience.

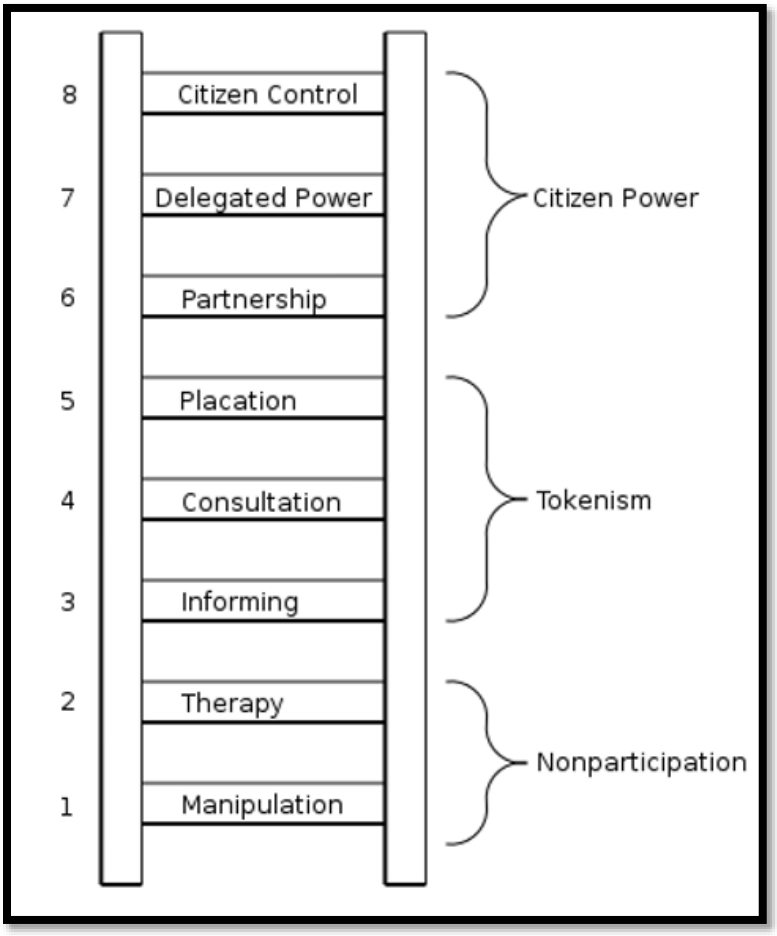

Fig 5.1 Arnstein's Ladder (1969) degrees of citizen participation

At the lower end of the ladder she depicts the limited power of the individual in the form of manipulation and therapy. In these non-participative states, the emphasis of the 'power holder' is either to educate or cure. Likewise, in the middle section of the ladder she emphasises a tokenistic form of participation where the techniques of informing, consultation and placation are used to give the pretence of being heard but without the "muscle" needed for change (Arnstein 1969, p. 217). Partnership, delegated power and citizen control are the top three rungs of the ladder. The emphasis in this third stage of the model is on citizen power and the 'have-nots' taking control of their affairs. Her influential model illustrates how citizens can be non-participating, dealt with in a tokenistic manner or engaged in taking real power in the institutions which affect them. The model has been cited extensively in youth work literature pertaining to participation (Ord 2007; Fitzsimons et al., 2011; McCready and Dilworth 2014) yet it remains to be seen whether youth work practitioners are cognizant of it.

In his seminal booklet on youth work, *Creators not Consumers*, Smith (1982) outlines an early youth work model of participation. He writes of youth work as a continuum which involves telling, selling, participating and spectating. While the last two stages are his preferences for the work, the first two of selling and telling depict what might be the case more often in practice. In this straightforward model the goal is that the power lies with the young person while the worker looks on.

Similarly, Westhorp's (1987 see Fig 5.2) model is depicted as a continuum. Having a sharp and blunt end, the spectrum relates to the level of power which the young person achieves. The continuum starts at the blunt end with ad-hoc input from the young person, moving through states of structured consultation,

influence, delegation, negotiation and to the sharp end which refers to the realised control of the young person. In this model, the sharp end relates to the level of power which young people have in the decisions which affect them. This model differs from Smith (1982) as each stage in Westhorp's continuum relates to the young person's input in the decision-making processes rather than the youth worker's action.

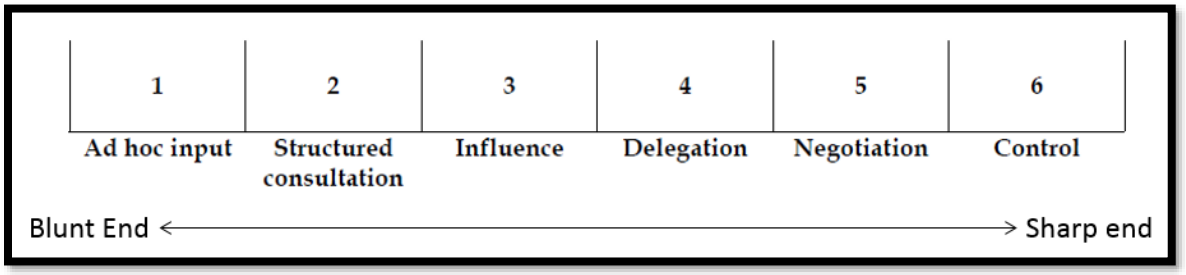

Fig 5.2 Gill Westhorp's (1987) participation continuum

Heavily influenced by Arnstein (1969, see Fig:5.1), Hart's (1992, see Fig 5.3) participation model is a frequently cited typology in the youth work literature (Wierenga 2003; Ord 2007; Podd 2010; Fitzsimmons et al., 2011; McCready and Dilworth 2014). Writing initially in a context of children's human rights for UNICEF, Hart defines participation as "*the process of sharing decisions"* (Hart 1992, p. 5). Hart's model is like that of Arnstein as it is depicted as a ladder. However, unlike Arnstein, the 8-rung ladder is separated into two sections involving degrees of participation and non-participation. The first rungs of the ladder involve the non-participatory functions of manipulation, decoration and tokenism. At this end of the ladder no real power or control is being afforded to the young person and Hart (1992, p. 10) argues children and young people "*learn from such experiences that participation can be a sham"*. On the participative end of the ladder from rungs 4 – 8, the power continuum sees young people as being assigned but informed; consulted and informed; moving

to adults and young people sharing in the decisions; then adult-initiated yet sharing decisions with young people and children; young person initiated and directed; and at the top rung, young person-initiated but shared decisions with adults. While in the form of a hierarchical continuum, Hart's emphasis is to share in the decision-making processes with young people. From this standpoint, there is clear recognition that young people can and should be able to make decisions by themselves and with adults. Treseder (2004) adapted Roger Hart's ladder of participation. Using similar language and ruling out the non-participatory aspects of his ladder, Treseder writes of different levels of involvement and presents Hart's five participation rungs as a non-hierarchical and context specific model. This model acknowledges that young people may not have the desire or will to reach the highest rung of the ladder but can be engaged with in a participative way.

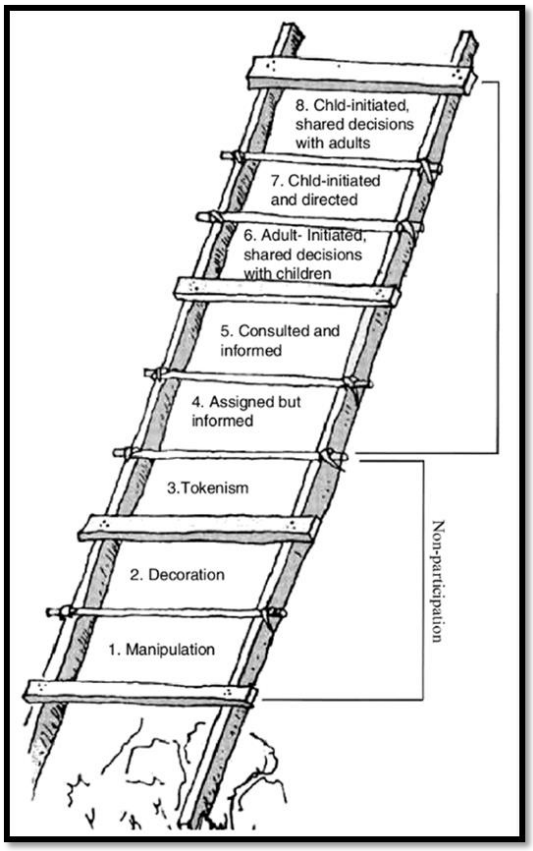

Fig 5.3 Hart's (1992) Ladder of children's and young people's participation

Unlike the previously outlined models, Shier's (2001) perspective is less of a continuum or hierarchy, but more of a journey. At each of the stages, Shier asks the practitioner to reflect on several rhetorical questions, which serve to develop more participative practice. Shier's model highlights five levels of participation – 1) children are listened to; 2) children are supported in expressing their views; 3) children's views are taken in to account; 4) children are involved in decision making processes; 5) children share power and responsibilities for decision making. Furthermore, at each level there are three stages of commitment – openings, opportunities and obligations. Rather than the model showing the young person's involvement, Shier (2001, 2006, 2010) promotes the responsibility of the youth worker and the organisation.

An alternative perspective on participation is taken by Elizabeth Rocha (1997). While still utilising the metaphor of a ladder, her approach differs somewhat by emphasising the notion of empowerment. Her desire is to see a shift from individual involvement to community involvement through five rungs – 1) Atomistic individual empowerment; 2) embedded individual empowerment; 3) mediated empowerment; 4) socio-political empowerment, and 5) political empowerment. This political perspective emphasises a societal change rather than solely that within the individual.

While not exhaustive (see McCready and Dilworth 2014) this review of participation models highlights the thrust of what currently exists amongst the youth work literature. The metaphors of ladder, continuums or even spider-graphs suggest that participation is a process which involves varying degrees of power, has differing entry points and a range of purposes. Nonetheless there is

commonality across the models with the desire to increase the power and engagement of the young person evident throughout.

Underlying Assumptions and Theoretical Perspectives

Although youth work places a strong emphasis on the concept of participation the underlying assumptions about such a process are not immediately evident from the discourse. Therefore, it is important to analyse some of the premises, underlying assumptions and theoretical perspectives inherent within the process of participation. There are two main emphases within the literature pertaining to the justification for participation and democratic practice within youth work. Participation is firstly thought of as a political activity wrought out of human rights and manifest in political education. Secondly participation is a way of working with young people which promotes learning, development and as such is an educational process.

Participation as a Political Activity

UNICEF (2014) recognises participation as a guiding principle of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989) makes specific reference to this fact and has been summarised as,

> "*The child has the right to express his or her opinion freely and to have that opinion taken into account in any matter or procedure affecting the child"* (Child Rights International Network 2014).

Fundamentally, the youth work literature suggests that participation is inextricably linked to human rights (Ord 2007, 2016a; Podd 2010; Cooper 2011; McCready and Dilworth 2014). Several of these articles emphasise participation and acknowledge the need for the engagement of young people and children in

the decisions which affect them. Furthermore, there is a public policy focus which emphasises the participation of children and young people in consultation processes (Podd 2010; Cooper 2011). This could be perceived as a tokenistic approach with Bessant (2003, cited Farthing 2012) urging policy makers to work less on their agendas, move beyond the rhetoric and respect young people's rights. The rhetoric in the youth work literature suggests that young people's views should be considered and acted upon, yet the accompanying research will determine the priority which workers give to such practice.

Arnstein (1969) is cited by many as the inspiration of the ladder metaphor and continuum models utilised in work with young people (Hart 1992; Simon 2008; Shier 2010). However, the premises behind the political and civic engagement which she promoted are less evident in the youth work literature. For Arnstein (1969, p.224) this deeply political idea has its roots in the civil rights movement of 1960s America with an aim to "*counteract the various corrosive political and socioeconomic forces that plague the poor*". Her bias to the poor is encapsulated in her goal of citizen control. The evolution of such a process within youth work parlance may not be so radical but nonetheless promotes participation and active citizenship. The emphasis here is on young people

> *"having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity – and where necessary the support – to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities to contribute to a better society"* (Council of Europe 2003 cited in Batsleer 2008, p.141).

The human rights and political rhetoric promoted by both UNCRC (1989) and Arnstein (1969) form the basis for, what Crick (1998) calls, active citizenship.

The political theorist, Bernard Crick (1929 -2008) argues that participation is subsumed in the term active citizenship and can be promoted through a process of citizenship education. Crick (1998) suggests active citizenship is an evolution of the earlier notions of political education and political literacy and concurs with Marshall (1950 cited Crick 1998, p.10), that it should be evident in three different aspects of life; the civil, the political and the social. While writing about the related term of civic education, Hargreaves (1994) similarly states that from the time of Aristotle the concept civic education is inherently political. It asks questions about society, how it has taken shape, the weaknesses and strengths of the political structures and how they might be improved. He adds *"active citizens are as political as they are moral; moral sensibility derives in part from political understanding; political apathy spawns moral apathy"* (Hargreaves 1994, p.37). This assertion drives Crick (2000, 2002, 2004) to argue for a citizen that is not passive nor even good, in that they sit under the law, vote and pay taxes. Rather, Crick (2004, p.79) is concerned with a citizenship that "*involves public discussion about whether laws work badly, whether they are unjust and how they can be changed"*. Although writing about formal education, he identifies the need for young people to become politically literate in both knowledge and experience.

Crick's (1998) report recommends that citizenship education in schools should be active and experiential, interactive, relevant, critical and participative. Expanding upon the presuppositions of citizenship education, Crick (1999) suggests certain beliefs and principles. He calls these procedural values, which include: Freedom, Toleration, Fairness, Respect for Truth and Respect for Reasoning. Active citizenship education incorporating these procedural values should, in Cricks view, promote a critical, non-exploitative, engagement of young

people (Crick 2000, 2002, Lockyer 2010). Although Crick (1998) and Lockyer (2010) are primarily concerned with the teaching of citizenship within a formal educational context there is a strong connection with some of the principles in the practice of youth work and informal education. McCready and Dilworth (2014) infer that citizenship and democracy are notions that should be caught not taught, implying that participation is about action and taking control rather than being regarded as a didactic, academic discipline. This goes to the heart of the educational assumptions and principles underpinning youth work.

Upon analysis, a major emphasis within the literature identifies participation as a political activity being a human right (UNCRC 1989); political in nature (Arnstein 1969; Cooper 2011) and something that should be taught in a way that brings about action (Crick 1998, 1999, 2000). A second focus of the literature is closely related but refers to participation as a way of working to educate others. This dimension of the concept is concerned with the benefits of and process of participation and democracy within an educational context. This second emphasis is exhibited in the work of John Dewey and Jack Mezirow and is the focus of the subsequent section.

Participation as an Educational Process

The educationalist John Dewey (1859 -1952) was an early proponent of the concept of democracy and participation in education. Rather than being a purpose of education such as political literacy or citizenship, Dewey (2007) suggests that education should be a democratic and participative process. Dewey (1997, p.67) argues that the learner should be participating in the learning process to support their development and criticises traditional education for its inability to *"secure the active co-operation of the pupil"*.

On a macro level Dewey (2007, p.76) presupposes that democratic societies should enable people to associate freely with each other and

> "*have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder"*.

He also contends that that this type of education should be evident in the classroom. Founded on Dewey's (2007) democratic ideals, Lambert (2009) likewise places the student (young person) at the centre of their learning. Lambert (ibid.) argues that the presuppositions form the basis for social education. While social education is a contested term, it has been used synonymously with youth work and informal education (Smith 2002). Lambert (2009) advocates for democratic environments in which young people can learn broader social skills. In turn, he outlines 5 beliefs underlying social education. The beliefs are as follows; Education is more than test scores; Children are not citizens-in-training; Behaviour in schools reflects community behaviour; Democratic community must be the context of education; Schools are arenas for change (Lambert 2009, p.121)

While specifically relating to social education these beliefs resonate with the processes within informal education and youth work. Specifically, Lambert argues for the democratic engagement of young people not as 'citizens in training' but to be treated as 'fully people' (Lambert 2009, p.125) in their own right. Also, Lambert (ibid., p.133) calls for educational processes which lead to possibility and change rather than the predetermined outcomes which formal education or product-based curriculum offers.

As has been outlined previously, the relationship within a learning context such as youth work is paramount. Dewey (2007, p.121) similarly argues that democratic relationships contribute to the quality of learning whereby the learner is the teacher and the teacher is the learner. This notion is akin to that of Freire's (1973) co-learning relationships. Kaplin (2009, p.336) further asserts that in an educational environment, the use of control and dominance to make young people "*fit a predetermined mould, can be successful only at the expense of democracy"*. Drawing upon Dewey, Jenlink (2009, p.391) concludes that working in this democratic way is *"transformative in nature and requires individuals who possess dispositions and understandings concerned with justice, equality and democracy".* This transformative task and the disposition it requires are high orders but are aligned with the value base, principles and youth work rhetoric highlighted elsewhere (Davies 2005; Jeffs and Smith 2005; Ord 2007; Banks 2010; Young 2010).

While the rhetoric on democracy is powerful the practical outworking of these ideals, principles and practices in a youth work context may be worthy of scrutiny. A focus of this research project is, therefore, to examine the ways in which youth workers envisage the outworking, underlying principles and philosophical basis of this esoteric topic, as the purpose and practice of youth work is investigated. The research investigates how youth workers understand participation and its role in youth work.

The founder of 'transformative learning' Mezirow, advocates for a participative and democratic approach to learning which is akin to that of Dewey yet also connects with the ideas of Crick. Mezirow (2003) argues that dialogue in an

educational context assists the learners and enables people to contribute to a democratic society. He states that

> *"democratic participation is an important means of self-development and producing individuals who are more tolerant of difference, sensitive to reciprocity, better able to engage in moral discourse and judgment, and more self-reflective"* (Mezirow 2003, p. 62).

These desired outcomes equate ambitions in the youth work literature on participation. Fostering democratic participation in a learning context such as youth work is a shared vision for the writers (Jeffs and Smith 2005; Young 2006; *In Defence of Youth Work,* 2011; McCready and Dilworth 2014); however, the research will help to determine if youth workers share this rhetoric.

Participation: Summary and Critique

The literature asserts that the concept and underpinning philosophies of participation and democracy offer youth work a framework for supporting young people to take greater power in the decisions which affect them. Simultaneously, participation is stated to aid their personal, political and moral development. Participation is therefore seen as both the means and the ends of development. For example, the process of participation (the means) can be the goal of a project with young people whereby they are learning new skills in how to work together. However, another emphasis is viewing and utilising participation as an end product. The objectives and outcomes in this instance may be identified as wide consultation and social inclusion. Hayward et al., (2004, p.104) argue that

> "*viewing participation as both means and end in both theory and practice therefore takes account of the complex, multifaceted nature of*

participation, and its potential to be both beneficial and detrimental to communities".

While the rhetoric resonates ideologically with proponents of these concepts, they are not without criticism.

An initial concern with the concepts of participation, democracy and power involves the ambiguity of the coterminous language and meaning. While there are many overlapping themes and emphases, some writers use the terms exclusively, yet others write synonymously. Crick (1998) emphasises the need for political literacy as an outcome of citizenship education and integrates the terms within the overarching process of participation. However, others differentiate between general decision making (Hart 1992; UNICEF 2014) and political participation (Arnstein 1969; Sundström and Fernández 2013; Expósito 2014). Simon (2008, p.16) places participation at the heart of citizenship but nevertheless recognises the ambiguity within this "*complex and pliable notion".* Dewey (1910, 2007) and Mezirow (2003) write of participation as supporting the learning process. Rather than a political process, in this context participation connects the learners to each other and creates an environment in which learning takes place. Therefore, when talking and listening to youth workers about participation there is a need to identify where they place themselves on the spectrum of meaning and how they understand the concept.

Another criticism centres on the dilution of the political significance in the participation parlance. Expósito (2014) criticises the term 'citizenship education' for its lack of tangible political participation and engagement. In outlining a continuum of perspectives on political participation he illustrates the breadth of

understanding and political diversity in the terminology. Furthermore, Simon (2008) criticises Crick's citizenship education perspective as too consensual, lacking the necessary radicalism which might affect real change for marginalised groups such as ethnic minorities. The application of Crick's citizenship education within a youth work context is supported by some (McCready 2011; McCready and Dilworth 2014) however a participation process which gathers around this 'narrow liberal' ideology may not include the most disenfranchised and marginalised young people (Olssen 2004; Simon 2008). Furthermore, a radical critique would suggest that participation, rather than being a process of empowerment and political engagement, is a form of social control which encourages conformity (Farthing 2012).

Moreover, Hayward et al., (2004, p.96) present a case for non-participation and peripheral participation. They challenge the underlying assumptions that broad-based participation is always a social good, questioning whether it leads to empowerment and appropriate problem solving. Citing three major problems with participation theory and practice they argue for the legitimacy of non-participation. First, they contend that the innovation brought about through participation can lead to the decay of long established community networks. Secondly, they found that participants often suffer from 'consultation fatigue'. Thirdly, the true representation of the participants is questioned and Hayward et al., (2004, p.104) assert that

> "*participatory methods therefore have the potential to reinforce and reproduce existing socio-political structures if they only promote the voices and values of those who are most articulate and easily accessible in a community"*.

While these criticisms have a degree of legitimacy, several studies (Kirby and Bryson 2002; Wierenga 2003; Beetham et al., 2008; McCready 2011) show that when key factors are present then participation theory and practice can be an effective process to engage, include and empower young people. Concerned with public decision making, Kirby and Bryson (2002) found that a key factor in several studies for engaging young people was the informality in the relationships which were built rather than more formal processes. The most effective engagement was marked by increasing community relations and dialogue between adults and young people though informal processes. They conclude that

> "*focusing too much on methods of involving young people leads to the danger that we ignore the other ways in which young people will have access to increased power in making decisions"* (Kirby and Bryson 2002, p.61).

In evaluating several participation programmes, McCready (2011) devised a check list of key factors which promoted participation. These include acknowledgment of the young person's ability to act, creating a sense of what is possible, promoting an inclusive process, awareness that it requires stimulation and support and recognising that skills need to be developed while identifying that *"participation is more than a learnt set of skills"* (McCready 2011, p.65). He suggests these factors are embedded in four key principles which mean that young people should have the (1) right, the (2) means the (3) space and the (4) opportunity to participate (ibid., p.63).

While these factors and principles have been shown to enhance the participation process, Wierenga (2003) offers a more robust framework for identifying 'what works'. In a comprehensive study of Australian youth participation projects, she identifies the three interconnected themes of meaning, connectedness and control which are evident in best practice. 'Meaning' relates to the purpose of the engagement with the young people. Rather than being tokenistic she argues that the engagement is meaningful with significant and tangible outcomes. Control relates to the power which the young people have within the project. This power is about shaping the direction of the project. Thirdly, connectedness refers to the quality of connections and relationships that are made with the community, thus adding a political dimension. She argues that participation without one or more of these components limits the potential of the process, leaving the young people alienated, manipulated or 'decisionless' (Wierenga 2003, p.69). The

diagram (Fig 5.4) illustrates the effects of a missing component in the participation process.

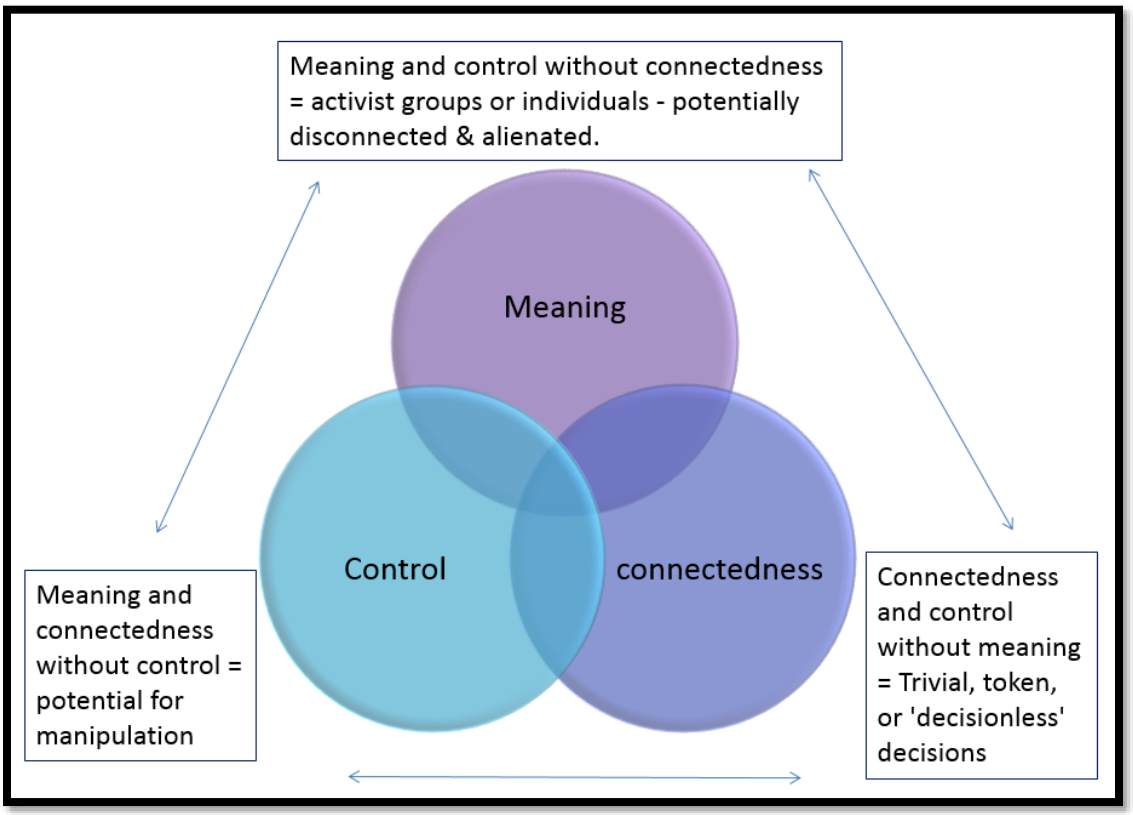

Fig 5.4 Control, Meaning and Connectedness (Wierenga 2003)

Participation is an esoteric term, yet it dominates youth work parlance. While the youth work literature places a strong emphasis on participation there is evidently no single unifying definition. There are numerous perspectives and various underpinning philosophies with a wide range of desired outcomes. The research will therefore endeavour to understand how youth workers reflect on the concept and process of participation and explore what they think of its purpose. Delineating and categorising their perspectives will therefore be a focal task in grappling with this process and theme of participation. Furthermore, the political dimension of participation will be explored with the research participants in the data collection phase.

Evidently, there are clear connections between the processes of relationship building, conversation and dialogue and participation. While stemming from different philosophical perspectives, subtle nuances about learning together in a participative way is a common theme emerging in each of these processes. While participation, conversation and dialogue and relationship building form a basis for youth work, a fourth process is significant in the literature. This involves the creation of, and learning from, experience.

Chapter Six: Experience and Learning in Youth Work

The fourth process underpinning the purpose of youth work to be examined in this review of literature is that of 'experiential learning' and the notion of learning through and from experience. John Dewey, the early twentieth century educationalist asserts that "*all genuine education comes through experience"* (Dewey 1997, p.25) yet he cautions that all experiences are not equally educative. This statement is not missed across the youth work literature, as much emphasis is placed on the quality and nature of the experience to fulfil the educative purpose of informal education (Jeffs and Smith 2005; Young 2006; Ord 2007; Batsleer 2008; Ord 2012). Therefore, this section will explore definitions, philosophical underpinnings and the purpose of experiential learning.

There are two focuses in the youth work literature regarding learning through experience. These are the areas of 'activities' (Spence 2001; Harte 2010) and 'experiential learning' (Jeffs and Smith 2005; Davies and Merton 2009; Young 2006; Ord 2012). While these are not synonymous terms there is an overlap in their meanings and it is therefore necessary to delineate and differentiate between the various ideas within each of these terms. Therefore, the initial part of this chapter will explore the place of activities in youth work and the second aspect will deal more specifically with the parlance and meaning of experiential learning and associated terms.

Activities in Youth work

According to Sean Harte (2010, p.85) activities have always *"loomed large within youth work practice"*. Activities usually refer to the programmed aspects of youth work (Spence 2001), include a vast array of topics, mediums and desired learning outcomes (Harte 2010) and consider the circumstances, preferences

and motivations of young people (Sapin 2009). They are a means of engaging young people to *"promote exchange, discourse, challenge and development of self and others"* (Harte 2010, p.86). Therefore, activities in a youth work context have a range of purposes.

Activities facilitate opportunities for young people that they may not have had otherwise, increasing the possibility of wider engagement and participation (Harte 2010). Jean Spence (2001, p.161) suggests that the youth organisations need to offer access to the "*newest popular activity"* in order to attract style conscious young people. Primarily, activities provide a social context for young people in creating friendships and associating with each other (ibid.). However, if the activity becomes the sole focus of the experience then youth workers take the risk in becoming no more than 'redcoats' (Foreman 1987) organising events and activities for their sake and missing out on their potential for learning. As Harte (2010, p.90) states, activities are tools which enable *"the educational processes of youth work to take place"* and as such "*act as a catalyst to initiate and hasten young people's development and learning"*.

The educational benefits of activities are recognised across the youth work literature (Spence 2001; Spence 2007; Sapin 2009; Harte 2010; Ord 2012). However other by-products of activities are evident. While Sapin (2009, p.91) similarly advocates that activities provide opportunities for young people to socialise, dialogue and take action she also states that *"youth work should be fun"*. This assertion is sometimes missed within a youth work context where purposeful engagement with young people is the primary focus and fun becomes less of a priority. While Sapin (2009) asserts that fun is a healthy outcome of activities she is not stating it as the sole focus. However, as the research evolves

it may be the case that youth work practitioners see ‘fun’ as a sufficient purpose for youth work.

Kerry Young (2006) acknowledges another outcome of activities as ‘relationships’. As the focus of an earlier chapter, building relationships is central to both youth work practice (Tiffany 2001; Sapin 2009; Blacker 2010; *In Defence of Youth Work*, 2011) and its educational purpose (Freire 1970; Rogers 1980; Rogers and Freiberg 1994). While young people do not necessarily engage in youth work because of the potential relationships they can form with peers and adults, Young (2006) suggests that activities are a medium for such connections to be formed. Activities, she states, can form the context for a *“warm welcoming place to be with friends”* (Young 2006, p.3). However, in acknowledging that activities do not necessarily reflect the purpose of youth work, the data could be contradictory.

Activities may be a focus for youth work practice giving young people a sense of fun, something which serves to occupy and assist in forming relationships. Indeed, both Banks (2010) and Harte (2010) argue that most activities can be placed on a continuum between recreation and education. However, the youth work literature emphasises the latter and the potential for learning which activities offer (Blacker 2010; Spence 2001; Jeffs and Smith 2005; Young 2006; Ord 2007 /2012; Sapin 2009; Harte 2010). Spence (2001, p.171) argues that activities act as a framework for the educational aspects of youth work and states that the youth worker is *“responsible for their educational value”*. It is therefore argued that activities become a catalyst for learning when they facilitate dialogue (Harte 2010), are purposeful (Spence 2001), and when youth workers use a measure of control over the experience (Banks and Jeffs 2010). In other

words, there needs to be some intention on behalf of the youth worker about the learning experience being created through activities.

Harte (2010) argues that learning through experience is not only about the quality of the activity but the levels of deconstruction, reflection and internalisation which occur to make the experience one of growth. He further contends that evaluation of the experience is "*often the most significant contribution towards the learning of all the parties"* (ibid., p.93). This type of reflective practice within an experiential context elevates the activity from something that just happens, to an experience with learning intentions, often referred to as 'experiential learning'. In the youth work literature experiential learning has become a synonymous term for describing the process of learning through experience (Jeffs and Smith 2005; Young 2006; Ord, 2012). Moreover, a study by Davies and Merton (2009, p.9) found that youth workers expressed the notion of *"youth work as a form of experiential learning"*. This requires further investigation.

Experiential Learning and Learning through Experience

While useful in describing an educational process, according to Weil and McGill (1989) the term experiential learning has become synonymous with a range of broad ideas, ideologies and practices. Usher (1993) acknowledges the ambiguous language in relation to the notion of learning and experience. He suggests there are clear distinctions between 'learning from (through/by) experience' and 'experiential learning'. He suggests the former involves learning taken from the context of the day to day life while experiential learning is the discourse and systematic extraction of insights gained from the experience. Nonetheless he recognises the importance of both ideas. For the purpose of this

study, the two terms will be used synonymously with an additional focus on learning cycles and models.

Likewise, Beard and Wilson (2006, p.19) write of the vague, indistinct and elusive definitions of experiential learning but go on to suggest that it is

> *"in essence, the underpinning process to all forms of learning since it represents the transformation of most new and significant experiences and incorporates them within a broader conceptual framework".*

Learning and experience are inextricably linked and as Boud et al., (1993, p.8) state "*it is meaningless to talk about one without the other, but rather, learning can only occur if the experience of the learner is engaged"*. Similarly, Kolb (1984, p.38) defines learning as *"the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience"*. While experiential learning draws upon a range of philosophical and psychological educational theories the basic premise of experiential learning is that learning takes place when connection is made between the *"action and the sensing or thinking about action"* (Beard and Wilson 2006, p. 17). As such Rogers (1996, p.16) asserts "*there is a growing consensus that experience forms the basis of all learning"*. These assertions and assumptions form the basis for defining and understanding experiential learning.

Furthermore, Weil and McGill (1989) categorise experiential learning into four metaphorical villages (see Table 6:1). Village one involves the accreditation of learning from life experience. This type of learning is sometimes acknowledged and accredited by higher educational institutes, employers and training. The second 'village' focuses on experiential learning as a basis for bringing about change in post school education and training. This branch of thinking is closely

aligned to the work of David Kolb (1984) and emphasises the process of learning rather than its outcomes. Village three makes the link between experiential learning and social change. Exponents of such theoretical ideas include Freire, Gramsci and Marx (Weil and McGill 1989). These theorists and educationalists gravitate away from the more individualistic approaches to learning through experience, extolling the virtues of social and community transformation (ibid., p.12) and this is therefore more political in nature. The fourth 'village' promotes the ideas of personal growth and development which lead to increased self-awareness. Personal and interpersonal experiences are emphasised in this village showing salience with the ideas of Rogers (1967, 1994). While these 'villages' of Weil and McGill (1989) offer clarity and disaggregate a vast array of thinking into four distinct perspectives the reality is less clear, with an overlap between these categorisations and meanings. Conversely, Smith (2001, 2010) suggests the term experiential learning is used in two contrasting senses, one relating to a form of teaching and the other pertaining to the experience of life itself. The youth work literature emphasises both views and tends to straddle across all but the first of the 'four villages'.

Four Metaphorical Villages	Perspective and Emphasis
Village 1	Accreditation and Academic Experiences
Village 2	Experiential Learning as a Basis for Bringing about Change in Post School Settings
Village 3	Experiential Learning as Social Change
Village 4	Personal Growth and Development

Table 6.1 The four metaphorical villages of experiential learning (Weil and McGill 1989)

In the youth work parlance and literature, as it relates to experiential learning, the ideas of John Dewey (1910, 1997, 2007) and David Kolb (1984, 2014) are prominent (Jeffs and Smith 2005; Young 2005; Ord, 2007, 2011; Hope 2011; Ord 2012). While Dewey's and Kolb's individual theories are distinct they draw upon a range of interrelated philosophical and educational ideas which centre on the assumption that learning is wrought through experience. Dewey, in essence, is about a philosophical approach to learning while Kolb draws on philosophical ideas to develop his experiential learning cycle. It is therefore necessary to explore the perspectives, underpinning philosophies and related theories of these two educationalists to gain a fuller understanding of how and why they have been so influential in the field of youth work.

Experience, Learning and Dewey

John Dewey (1859-1952) was an educational philosopher writing at the turn of the twentieth century. Challenging the thinking of traditional and progressive views of education, Dewey espoused the philosophical ideas of pragmatism as an alternative. American pragmatism as a philosophical perspective developed in

the late nineteenth century and served as a mediating or consensual method amidst the various philosophical contradictions of the day (Elkjaer 2009). Elkjaer (2009, p.76) exemplifies these contradictions as science versus religion; intuition versus empiricism and positivism versus romanticism. Insisting that philosophy should be practically useful, Dewey believed that people had the ability to respond to a given situation *"in an intelligent way"* (Elkjaer 2009, p.77) drawing upon a range of philosophies and ideas to find solutions. For Dewey this meant that for any given problem, issue or situation within an educational context, resolution could be found through a process of inquiry rather than to presuppose the answer (ibid.). Pragmatism however, is not the only idea which has been influenced by Dewey.

While historically the work of John Dewey is placed at the beginning of the twentieth century, Edgar (2012) argues that Dewey's thinking was most influential in the 1950s. This post 'sputnik' era saw the emergence of a new emphasis in education with a movement away from recitation, literacy and rote learning towards extraction literacy which involves questioning, inquiry, investigation and has a focus on experience. The evolution towards extraction literacy was embedded in three theoretical approaches of behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism. Edgar (2012) suggests that, among others (Gagne, Piaget, Bruner, Kant, Goodman cited Edgar 2012), Dewey has been an influential figure within the latter two theoretical perspectives.

According to Wenger (2009, p.217) the pedagogical focus within cognitive theories is on the *"processing and transmission of information through communication, explanation, recombination, contrast inference and problem solving".* The premise is that *"learners needed to understand with more*

complexity what they were expected to learn" (Edgar 2012, p.5) rather than learning through repetition and recitation. Furthermore, Edgar (ibid.) contends that a knowledgeable learner is one who solves problems making sense of their world through a process of investigating hypotheses and extending broader generalisations (Gredler 2005; Edgar 2012). This investigative and experiential approach is the basis for Dewey's thinking.

Dewey is similarly associated with the theory of constructivism (Edgar 2012). This theoretical perspective emphasises experience as a process of learning and favours *"self-directed activities orientated towards design and delivery"* (Wenger 2009, p.217) whereby learners actively engage in the learning process. Constructivism works from the basis that everyone constructs their *"perspective of the world through individual experiences and schema"* (Edgar 2012, p.4). The theory purports that the environment which is created supports learners to construct their knowledge and understanding of reality.

Cognitivism and constructivism are not without criticism (Gredler 2005; Edgar 2012). Nonetheless these theoretical perspectives are based on the premise that experience and learning are inextricably linked. The experience may either relate to thinking and cognition as Dewey's (1910) early work would suggest or to the pragmatism and experiential nature of learning for which he is later renowned (Dewey 2007; Pring 2007; Elkjaer 2009). Either way, his philosophical ideas have been influential (Edgar 2012). Along with understanding his influence on educational theory and constructs, it is also necessary to further explore his ideas and how they specifically relate to experiential learning.

While Beard and Wilson (2006, p.17) suggest that Dewey is the *"foremost exponent of the use of experience for learning"*, Ord (2016a, p.42) goes further by stating he is the founding father of experiential education. In his seminal 1938 text, Dewey (republished 1997) outlines a philosophical framework for understanding the relationship between experience and education. He proposes two criteria, in the form of principles, to assess whether an experience is educative or 'mis-educative'. Dewey (1997) argues that these principles of 'continuity' and 'interaction' form the basis for the learning experience.

Continuity he suggests is the recognition that all previous experiences relate to the present and future. As such,

> *"the principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after"* (Dewey 1997 p.35).

He recognises that not all learning which comes from experience results in positive behaviour. However, in a response to his critics he suggests that the educator must use insight in organising the conditions for the experience to produce positive learning outcomes. In this context, Dewey places a high level of responsibility on the educator to be mature and faithful to their own knowledge and experience (ibid., p.38). While not identical, these assumptions of Dewey are akin to those expressed by Rogers (1984) through his emphasis on congruence and empathy, thus creating the conditions for learning to take place. As Dewey (1997, p.38) states, it is the "*business of the educator to see in what direction an experience is heading"* and their job to know how to facilitate the process.

Interaction, as the second of Dewey's principles, is based upon an assumption that, ultimately, all human experience is social and that it involves communication and contact (Dewey 1997). He is concerned with the transactions that are happening between the individual, their environment and the situations in which they find themselves. This interaction he suggests places equal rights with the experience (external conditions) and the internal conditions of the individual. The environment in his view relates to how these conditions interact with "*personal needs, desires, purposes and capacities to create the experience"* (ibid., p.44). Ultimately, it is up to the educator to interact with the individual in such a way that their needs are met and the optimum environment for learning is created.

Dewey (1997) contends that traditional education did not consider the needs or power of the individual, but it imposed knowledge from the knowing (educator) to the unknowing (pupil/young person). This educational idea is similar to Freire's (1970) banking concept whereby the educator assumes to metaphorically fill up the empty vessel of the student without dialogue and interaction. Rogers (1977, p.326) too, held a similar view, calling it the *"politics of jug and mug theory of education".* The alternative relational, interactive and student-centred approach of Dewey is shared by Rogers and Freiberg (1994). At the heart of Dewey's philosophy is a view that

> "*the attitude of childhood is naïve, wondering, experimental* (and that the) *right methods of education preserve and perfect this attitude and thereby short-circuit for the individual the slow progress of the race, eliminating the waste that comes from inert routine"* (Dewey 1910, p. 156).

The criticism Dewey has for inactive approaches to learning challenges the status quo. This view, like that of Freire (1970) and Rogers and Freiberg (1994) holds that education is not a passive process but rather, active and experiential with the individual possessing a greater degree of power and control in their learning.

Criticism of Dewey

John Dewey's educational theoretical perspectives and ideas are not without criticism (Wright Mills 1963; Pring 2007; Elkjaer 2009; Ord 2012). On a basic level his notion of experience is difficult to comprehend and can be too easily confused with the more technical understanding of the term, 'experiential learning' (Elkjaer 2009, p. 74). The dominance of the clearer and more pragmatic concepts of experiential learning and David Kolb's (1984) learning cycle creates a blurred vision of Dewey's ideas on experience and education. A secondary criticism concerns Dewey's focus on inquiry. As such, Bantock (1963, cited Ord 2012, p.63) criticises his perspective as being too practical in overemphasising problem solving in the *"search for knowledge as well as misinterpreting knowledge itself"*. Conversely, Ord (ibid.) argues that Dewey's conceptualising of educative experience is as "*much about meaning making as it is about a concern with discovering solutions to practical problems"*.

More fundamentally Charles Wright Mills (1963) criticises Dewey for his lack of political orientation. The focus of his criticism extends beyond Dewey's educational views to his philosophical bent of 'pragmatism'. Wright Mills (1963, p.66) argues that as an academic movement, 'pragmatism' is too technological and "*not deeply enough political"*. He cites Dewey as belonging to the intellectual elite where pragmatism has been an ideology of the liberal professional man

(ibid.). He scathingly asserts that the *"political experience of most pragmatists has been limited to university"* (ibid., p.167). Furthermore, Wright Mills (1963, p.300) argues that the role of the intellectual is to engage politically, and suggests that Dewey's experimental inquiry methods do not sufficiently address the political problems in which people find themselves (ibid., p. 466). While there appears to be some merit in Wright Mills' criticism, Ord (2012) asserts that as a founding member of the 'National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People' (NAACP) Dewey was himself prepared to act in ways which attempted to address issues of oppression, power and politics even though this is "*not explicit in his philosophy of experiential learning"* (Ord 2012, p.68).

Finally, Pring (2007) euphemistically contends that Dewey's ideas have experienced both a death and resurrection in recent years. Wesbrook (1991, cited Pring 2007) suggests that Dewey was scapegoated in the 1950s for all that was wrong with education in the American school system. It was not only his child centred philosophical ideas which came under attack but "*his radical conception of democracy and community"* (Pring 2007, p.161). Pring also suggests that Dewey's philosophical ideas were not treated seriously due to their roots in pragmatism which could not be easily aligned to the prevailing positivist empiricism of the time. However, there is a revival of interest in the work and thinking of Dewey (Pring 2007, p.162). Philosophers Richard Rorty and Alan Ryan hold Dewey in high esteem with Rorty (1979 cited ibid.) claiming he is one of *"the three most important philosophers of the [twentieth] century",* the others being Wittgenstein and Heidegger. Pring (2007) contends that Dewey's significant contribution to learning resides in his emphasis on experience and democracy in learning contexts. Creating environments where young people's

interest and experience are engaged in a democratic and equal way prepares *"them for facing new experiences and managing their lives in the future"* (Pring 2007, p.165). It is for this reason that in a learning context of youth work, Dewey's ideas have been espoused.

Youth Work and Dewey

While John Dewey wrote in the context of formal education his view that education should be both experiential and democratic resides within much of the British and Irish youth work literature (Jeffs and Smith 2005; Young 2006; Ord 2007 and 2012; In Defence of Youth Work 2011;). Jeffs and Smith (2005) are drawn to Dewey's definition of education as the *"emancipation and enlargement of experience"* (Dewey 1910, p. 156). Offering a simplified summary of his ideas, Jeffs and Smith (2005, p.59) suggest that the youth worker's role is to assist young people in gaining *"a greater understanding or appreciation of their experiences"*. They contend that Dewey's view of experience within the educational context of youth work involves a deepening of understanding, enabling young people to find freedom. Emancipation they suggest *"is a process of setting free"* (ibid.). While somewhat esoteric the notion of freedom or emancipation is central to Dewey's thesis. As this study progresses it should become clear if youth workers are convinced of the correlation between experiential learning and freedom.

Ord (2012) offers a measured criticism of Jeffs and Smith's (2005) interpretation of experiential learning as it relates to Dewey. He contends that Dewey would be wary of the type of distinctions which Jeffs and Smith make between separating thoughts, ideas and experience. According to Ord (2012, p. 62), Dewey

> *"would insist that theories and ideas can only make sense in relation to the lived experience of individuals and communities and as such they necessarily inform and enlarge experience"*.

As such, Dewey presents a holistic understanding of experience. While Jeffs and Smith (2005), according to Ord (2012), may not hold the most integrated view of Dewey's work, they have nonetheless espoused his thinking as having resonance with the purpose of youth work.

Young (2006) is similarly drawn to Dewey's work. She asserts that the process of youth work enables young people to think critically, making sense of their world and learn from experience. As such she states,

> *"youth work is an educational activity and education, following Dewey, is a liberating experience that encourages reflective behaviour and promotes growth and health, developing the individual and supporting their participation in society"*, (Young 2006, p.78).

These three themes of liberation, reflection and participation owe much to the ideas found in Dewey's (1910, 1997, 2007) work. The ideas of Dewey integrate experiential learning within the processes of relationship building, conversation and dialogue, and participation, written about in previous chapters. As such, the work of John Dewey (1910, 1997, 2007) has undoubtedly been a significant influence within the youth work literature (Smith 1982; Jeffs and Smith 2005; Young 2006; Ord 2007, 2012; Ord and Leather 2011; Hope 2011). However, the extent to which Dewey's specific ideas are evident in the thinking of youth workers should become apparent in the data collection phase of the research.

David Kolb and Experiential Learning

While the work of John Dewey has become synonymous with the concept of 'experiential learning' or 'learning by doing' (Anderson 2006), implicitly, Ord (2012) suggests it is Kolb's cyclical model and thinking which dominates the parlance and literature of youth work. There is truth in this assertion, in that Jeffs and Smith (2005), Young (2006), Hope (2011) and Ord (2012, 2016a) reference his ideas on experiential learning theory. Therefore, this section will present, analyse and critique Kolb's learning cycle model and the underpinning philosophical ideas while making connections with the purpose of youth work.

At the basis of Kolb's model are four assumptions about learning. From his experiential perspective, Kolb (1984, 2014) firstly emphasises that learning is not based on outcomes but rather is a process of adaptation involving problem solving, decision making and creativity. He asserts that

> "*when learning is conceived as a holistic adaptive process, it provides conceptual bridges across life situations such as school and work, portraying learning as a continuous, lifelong process"* (Kolb 1984, p.33).

His second assumption is that knowledge is not an entity to be acquired or transmitted but something that is continuously created and recreated and, as such, is a transformative process. Thirdly, learning transforms experience both subjectively and objectively. This idea resonates with Dewey's (1997) concept of 'interaction' whereby he describes the relationship between the environment (objective experience) and the person's subjective experience. While Kolb (1984, 2014) suggests that 'transaction' is a better word to describe this relationship he similarly attests that the interaction of the subjective and objective brings about change. It is, therefore, this change in which he is interested. The fourth aspect

of Kolb's thinking asserts that if learning is to be understood then *"we must understand the nature of knowledge and vice versa"* (Kolb 1984, p.38). Kolb suggests that grasping how knowledge is understood and acquired happens through a range of psychological and epistemological processes. This idea is derived from the work of Piaget (1978, p.651) who argues that knowledge comes from three sources; the subject, the object or *"from multiple interactions between the subject and the object"*. The assumption views knowledge as not merely something objective, rather it is embroiled in the subjectivity and objectivity of the person and the environment, namely, through experience.

It is well documented that Kolb's ideas are connected to those of Dewey (Kolb 1984; Anderson 2006; Beard and Wilson 2006; Kolb and Kolb 2008; Ord 2012). However, Kolb's experiential learning theory is also influenced by the educational thinkers of Lev Vygotsky, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget (Kolb 1984, 2014), Paulo Freire and Carl Rogers (Kolb 1984, 2014; Baker et al., 1997; Kolb and Kolb 2008, 2009). While space does not permit a full exploration of all these theorists' ideas, suffice to state that, the perspectives from which Kolb has drawn his experiential learning cycle have interlocking themes and share a similar philosophical base. While Kolb has become the name associated with experiential learning, Jarvis (2010, p.76) contends that one of his main aims was to build a *"theory based on the work of those who preceded him".* Arguably, this is the case, with numerous references to these theorists throughout his literature.

Kolb's theory as a culmination of others' ideas is represented as a learning cycle. While originally based on Lewin's (1951) learning model (Kolb 1984, p. 21), Kolb and Fry (1975) depicted experiential learning as a four-stage model. They recognise that the learning cycle is continuous and can begin at any stage (cited

Jarvis 2010; Smith 2001, 2010). As Kolb (1984, p. 41) works from the premise that learning is *"the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience"*, then it follows that the concrete experience is the entry point of the cycle. The four-stage model outlines two pairs of dialectically related modes. The first pair of related modes are concrete experience (what happened) and abstract conceptualisation (thinking of what happened) which are proposed as ways of grasping experience (Kolb and Kolb 2008). The second set of dialectically related modes relate to the transformation of experience by reflective observation and active experimentation. Experiential learning, Kolb and Kolb (2008, p.298) state, *"is a process of constructing knowledge that involves a creative tension among the four learning modes"*. They assert that this recursive process of experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting is responsive to the learning context and the learning taking place. Smith (2001,2010) simply outlines the four-stage model stating that the first stage involves taking action with the second stage involving a reflection on that action. Consequently, the third stage necessitates theorising about the incident to see if there are generalisable principles that can be drawn from the situation with the final stage testing the new understanding in a new setting. As a result, Kolb argues that *"experiential learning theory is a holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition and behaviour"* (Kolb 1984, p.21) and as such each stage of the model corresponds with differing or preferred styles of learning (Elkjaer 2009).

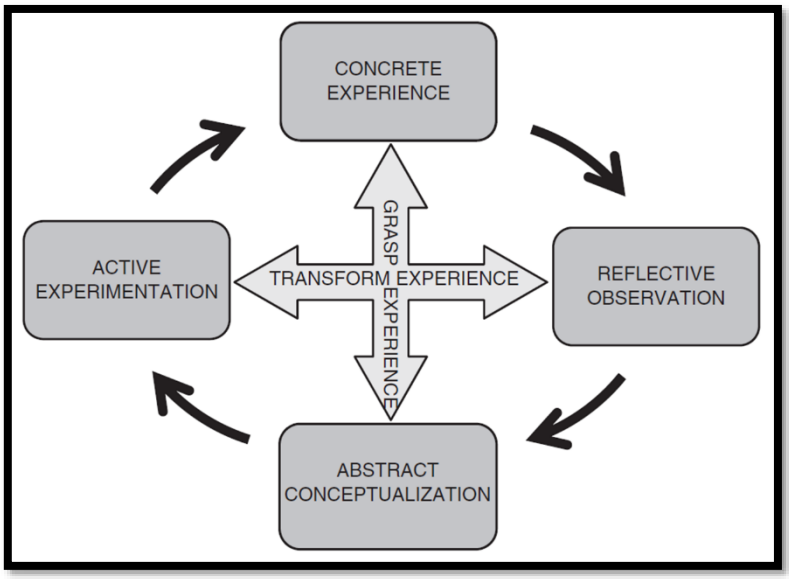

Fig 6.1 The experiential learning cycle (Kolb and Kolb 2008)

Kolb's experiential learning theory is one of the most cited and popular (Elkjaer 2009; Jarvis 2010) with numerous depictions and evolutions of his model. The diagrammatic representations illustrate this point with Fig 6.1 being a basic illustration of his earlier model and Fig 6.2 illustrating a complex adaptation of the same model utilised by Learning from Experience Trust (2015).

However, other models and variations exist which have been heavily influenced by Kolb. Several simple three stage models have been cited by Roger Greenway (2002). These have been utilised in the field of outdoor education (Neil 2010) and located within youth work resources (Youth Work Essentials 2015).

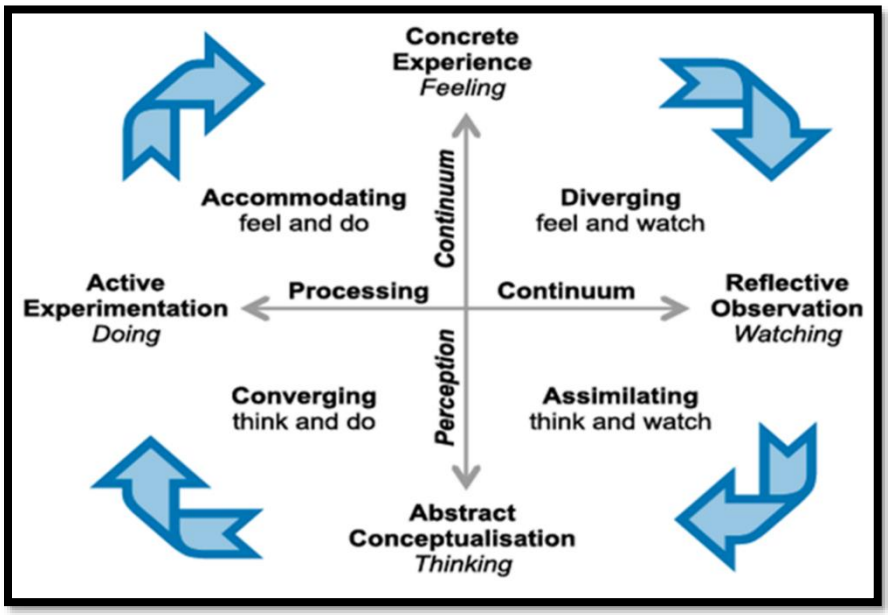

Fig 6.2 Kolb's learning cycle cited Learning from Experience Trust (2015)

Finally, an evolution of Kolb's model has produced a learning styles instrument (LSI). He proposed that with each point in his cyclical model a preferred learning style exists. These correspond to activist (concrete experience), reflector (observation and reflection), theorist (abstract conceptualisation) and pragmatist (active experimentation) (Kolb 1984). This learning styles instrument was further developed in the 1990s by Honey and Mumford (1992) to become a questionnaire for understanding self in relation to learning.

Evidently, from the literature and websites on experiential learning which relate to outdoor and formal education, youth work and management, the Kolb learning cycle model and LSI or derivatives thereof dominate the thinking on this topic. However, while this may be accepted as the norm in some quarters it is necessary to examine a critique of Kolb's model and thinking.

Critique of Kolb

Kolb's experiential learning theory depicted as a cycle has dominated the youth work literature (Smith 2001, 2010; Young 2006; Ord 2007 and 2012; Hope 2011; Humphrey 2014). However, a number of criticisms of both the model and theoretical underpinnings are worthy of investigation and scrutiny. A primary criticism relates to the simplicity of the model (Beard and Wilson 2006). While Kolb (1984), Baker et al., (1997; 2005) and Kolb and Kolb (2008; 2009) write of their multilinear model and the various aspects to the theory, Jarvis (2010, p.77) suggests that the model, although popular, does not account for the "*complexity of human learning"*. As such, Jarvis (1987, 2009 cited Jarvis 2010) argues that in tests conducted with groups of adult learners the model is deemed to over simplify the learning process. Furthermore, Coffield et al., (2004) and Race (2007) criticise the model for its attempt to systematise a learning process that is neither systematic nor linear. Coffield et al., (2004) go further in suggesting that the notion of a learning cycle may be a seriously flawed way of understanding learning and are particularly harsh in their treatment of the learning styles instrument. They suggest that Kolb's 'LSI' or even the subsequent Honey and Mumford (1992) model is unable to capture the *"complexities and the multifaceted nature of learning"* (Coffield et al., 2004, p.75).

Alongside Coffield et al., (2004), Jarvis (2009, p.23) writes of the "flawed nature" of Kolb's model as he reckons that it has omitted the social and interactional aspects to learning. This criticism is shared by Ord (2012) as he contrasts Kolb's ideas with those of John Dewey, suggesting the simple four stage model does not give account sufficiently for the experiential learning process and the interactions therein. Kolb's model is further criticised for it schismatic view of experiential learning. Elkjaer (2009) argues that Kolb's focus on action and

thinking as separate entities weakens the notion of an integrated and holistic experience within a learning context. This view is similarly shared by Ord (2012, p.69) who argues that John Dewey offers a *"richer, less impoverished notion of experience",* one that is more integrated and where several processes (e.g. thinking and experience) can occur at once (Smith 2001, 2010).

An additional criticism relates to Kolb's view and understanding of knowledge. Smith (2001, 2010, p.8) suggests that Kolb sees knowledge from the lens of social psychology and does not "*connect with the rich and varied debates about the nature of knowledge that raged over the centuries within philosophy and social theory"*. Kolb is also criticised for being focussed on processes within the individual mind (Smith 2001, 2010; Elkjaer 2009, p. 86) as opposed to viewing learning as situated within a context.

The empirical basis for Kolb's theory is the final focus of attention. Smith (2001, 2010) asserts that the initial sample for Kolb's research was small. Jarvis (2010) cites his own research in challenging the premise and ideas of Kolb's original findings and Wiestra and de Jong's (2002 cited Coffield et al., 2004, p.69) analysis *"reduces Kolb's model to a bipolar structure of reflection versus doing"*. From this basis the empirical basis for the model is thought to be questionable and unreliable.

While these critical views are significant, Kolb (1984) Baker et al., (2005) and Kolb and Kolb (2008 and 2009) suggest otherwise. They view their experiential learning theory draws upon an in-depth range of philosophical and psychological ideas which culminate in their knowledge *"about how people learn, grow, and develop"* (Baker et al., 2005, p. 412). These assumptions and empirical

deductions form the basis for the Kolb model and thinking. While it may be, as the critics suggest, difficult to join up all the thinking there is no doubting the rich tapestry of thought from which Kolb's model draws. Specifically, Kolb draws upon Dewey's philosophical notion of experience, the psychological developments of Piaget and Lewin and the relational and conversational ideas of Rogers, and Freire respectively. While often viewed simplistically, (Elkjaer 2009; Smith 2001, 2010; Jarvis 2010) Kolb has something substantial to say about the process of learning.

The learning cycle is a manifestation of a multitude of ideas and this is cited as a reason for its popularity (Elkjaer 2009; Jarvis 2010). However, as Tennant (1997, p.92 cited Smith 2001, 2010) indicates

> *"the model provides an excellent framework for planning teaching and learning activities and it can be usefully employed as a guide for understanding learning difficulties, vocational counselling, academic advising and so on"*

and therefore, should not be so easily dismissed.

Alternative Experiential Learning Cycles and Models

While Kolb's learning cycle is regarded as *"a minimalist interpretation of the complex operations of the brain"* (Beard and Wilson 2006, p.43) alternative theories and models exist to explain more sophisticated processes. One such model is proposed by Jarvis (2009, 2010, 2012). Although critical of the Kolb model he is not without an alternative perspective. Jarvis suggests there are more complex processes at work which relate to learning for life rather than just a one-off experience. Kolb's model, he suggests, endeavours to elicit

generalisable notions of learning as the learner goes through the cycle. However, Jarvis (2012, p.7) contends that Kolb's *"research does not suggest generalisation occurs immediately following a new learning experience but only after we have tried out the resolution to our disjuncture on several occasions"*. Here, Jarvis assumes that it is a process of perseverance and retrying that brings about learning rather than solely the cycle of reflection, conceptualising and active experimentation which Kolb asserts. Jarvis (2009) offers a more complex model than that of Kolb emphasising memorisation, connection with emotions and the changing of a mindset or being. Unlike the inferred interpretation of Kolb's (1984) model, Jarvis (2012) suggests that learning takes place in the contexts of the learner's everyday lives. The disjuncture to which he refers is effectively an experience which the learner encounters, one that he argues can be transformed by thought, emotion or action (Jarvis 2009 and 2012) and which should ultimately change the person.

Likewise, Chris Argyris and Donald Schön (1996) developed a double loop learning system whereby they proposed a similar cycle to that of Kolb with an additional cycle to test the initial assumptions. They contend that the testing of underlying assumptions gives greater depth to the learning and questions the fundamental premises. As Beard and Wilson (2006, p.248) assert, within single loop learning the question may be posed *"Am I doing the thing, right?"* while the added question for double loop learning is *"Am I doing the right things?".* Argyris and Schön's (1996) view of experiential learning is akin to that of Jarvis and Kolb in that it is based upon the need for reflection in action and on action. This emphasis on reflection permeates the writing on experiential learning (Schön 1983, 1987; Kolb 1984; Fenwick 2000; Elkjaer 2009).

Reflection that brings about holistic change for the person is an idea that also resonates with the transformative learning theory expounded by Mezirow (1981, 2009). Transformative learning is defined as

> *"the process by which we transform problematic frames of reference (mindsets, habits of mind, meaning perspectives) – sets of assumption and expectation – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change"* (Mezirow 2009, p. 92).

The aspirations of this learning process are similar to the purpose of youth work as moral philosophy outlined by Young (2006, 2010) as discussed in chapters two and seven of this thesis. Yet, there is little evidence throughout the youth work literature specifically espousing the work of Mezirow.

Learning through Experience: Summary

It is noteworthy that these experiential learning models and theories are classified by Fenwick (2000) as a reflective constructivist perspective. This perspective, promoted by such theorists as Piaget, Vygotsky, Kolb and Dewey (cited Cooperstein & Kocevar-Weidinger 2004) is rooted in adult and lifelong learning and *"casts the individual as a central actor in a drama of personal meaning-making"* (Fenwick 2000, p. 248). The emphasis within such a perspective acknowledges the power of learner for constructing their version of reality. The central premise from this constructivist viewpoint is that *"a learner is believed to construct, through reflection, a personal understanding of relevant structures of meaning derived from his or her action in the world"* (ibid.). Therefore, the cross cutting theme of reflection is deemed to be the key element in the learning process. The reflection may be as a specific component of the learning cycle/process such as that outlined by Kolb (1984) and Jarvis (2012);

reflection in or on action as understood by Argyris and Schön (1996) and Schön (1983); the reflection within and throughout the experience itself as proposed by John Dewey (1910, 1997) or the *"critical reflection of the established belief"* espoused by Mezirow (cited Dirkx et al., 2006 p.124). Whether constructivism is a perspective which youth workers embrace is uncertain, but the ensuing research should bring clarity to the assumptions behind youth workers either utilising an experiential learning framework or not.

Perhaps the youth work literature is drawn to Kolb's and other experiential learning models because of their simplicity, with more complex ideas unable to find their way to youth work theory and practice. However, it could be more than the simplicity. As has been shown, embedded within the experiential learning models are shared values and notions with those of youth work regarding the place of: reflection in the learning process (Young 2006; Hope 2011); power which the learner should possess (Davies 2005); the voluntary nature of the learning experience (Jeffs and Smith 2005; Young 2006) and respectful treatment of the young person where they exercise democratic choice (Banks 2010; Henry et al., 2010; McCready 2012). In conducting the empirical data collection with youth work practitioners, it will be of interest to ascertain which if any learning models or cycles are espoused and the rationale for utilising one over another. The research will also attempt to find out which, if any, theoretical frameworks youth workers employ as they create opportunities and experiences for young people to learn and what informs them as they think about a rationale and purpose for their practice. Finally, the research will help to ascertain how youth workers view experiential learning whether it is a model or set of ideas which link experience to learning.

Chapter Seven: Summary of Literature Review and a Unifying Theory

The literature reviewed represents a cross section of the theoretical concepts and processes which underpin the purpose and practice of youth work. The material covered in the initial section referred to the problematizing of the purpose and examination of the defining characteristics of youth work. It is the contention of the writer that the purpose of youth work is better understood in terms of the processes by which it engages. As such the subsequent chapters referred to the processes which dominate the literature. Whilst the four processes of relationship building, conversation and dialogue, participation and experiential learning may not be exhaustive they represent thinking which is central to much writing on youth work.

In outlining the four processes and underpinning philosophies the inherent educational purpose for each is clear. Relationship building fosters the climate for learning to take place (Rogers 1967). Furthermore, Rogers and Freiberg (1994, p.161) contend that the evidence to support learning within this person-centred approach *"seems irrefutable"*. Conversation and dialogue also supports and facilitates learning (Freire 1970, 1973). The equality which this process offers each participant enables an openness and freedom that is not always found in formal learning settings (Freire 1973; Bakhtin 1984; Habermas 1984/1987). Thirdly, participation is deemed a purpose of informal and non-formal education (Crick 2000; Podd 2010) but it is also a process to enhance learning (Mezirow 2003; Dewey 2007). Therefore, participation is a process which gives power and choice to the participants (Arnstein 1969; Wierenga 2003) and enables them to take control of their learning. The fourth process of learning through experience encourages investigation (Edgar 2012) and

reflection in and on action (Schön 1987). The earliest proponent of learning through experience is thought to be John Dewey (Beard and Wilson 2006; Ord 2007). While experience is a difficult word for educationalists (Oakshotts 1933, cited Jarvis 2010, p.76), Dewey (1997) suggests that it is at the heart of education and deepens learning. Kolb (1984, 2015) takes some of Dewey's ideas and develops them into the term 'experiential learning'. A primary purpose of experiential learning is the transformation (Kolb 1984) within the learner.

Central to the four processes are many philosophical ideas with underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions. While distinct there is much cross-over and linkage between these four processes. Throughout the range of thinking presented, common themes relating to the equality of learner/facilitator, relationship, participation, democracy and learning were discussed at length. The common ground between them is more implicit than explicit but the emphasis throughout is on the purpose of each process and their relationship to learning. The cross-cutting themes could be encapsulated within the ideas of many of the theorists outlined in the literature review.

Many of the philosophical and theoretical perspectives previously outlined, while having distinctive characteristics, could offer a unifying theory for youth work to bring the four processes together. Freire, Rogers, Crick or Dewey all stress the importance of the relationship between educator and learner, the conversational and dialogical aspects of learning, democratic and participatory engagement, and the experiential nature of the learning process. Others, such as Jack Mezirow (1923-2014) with his emphasis on transformative learning and its participative, experiential and conversational basis could have similarly offered

an overarching and alternative lens. The ontological ideas of the nature of learning and epistemological notions of how people learn are central to the ideas outlined in the literature review.

Furthermore, the social theorist, Michel Foucault (1926 – 1984) offers a discourse on power which would be fitting for a study of this nature, given the democratic emphasis in the literature. Additionally, the political scientist, Robert Putnam (b.1941), presents a perspective on social capital which could be viewed as a purpose of youth work. Conversely, Pierre Bourdieu's (1941 – 2004) work on habitus proposes a framework for helping to understand youth work. From such a perspective the character or nature of youth work could be explored. While the researcher could analyse youth work literature from these various lenses to develop an overarching and unifying theory, Jürgen Habermas was deemed more useful in analysing the type of learning which takes place in a youth work context.

Although Habermas' thinking relates more to the first three of the four processes outlined, his understanding of learning is fitting as it pertains to various types of learning which are evident in youth work literature and practice. Habermas suggests that learning can be instrumental, practical and emancipatory in its nature. Habermas views the emancipatory nature of education as the top of the learning hierarchy (Rogers 1996) and sees learning as bringing about freedom. Furthermore, rather than specifically write about experience, Habermas (1987) emphasises the experiential nature of conversation, relationship and participation. These views differ considerably from that of Dewey (1997), whose more complex understanding sees education and learning as experiential (Ord 2012).

Dewey (1997), following a pragmatic school of philosophy, does not view learning as necessarily leading to freedom but rather holds a tension between traditional notions of learning and more radical forms. He suggests that perpetuating the "idea of freedom may become as dogmatic as the traditional education which it reacted against" (Ibid., p.22). Moreover, Dewey held that education should be a democratic process rather than necessarily leading to democracy and freedom. His political views have been questioned (Wright Mills, 1963) and contrast with those of Habermas.

The ideas of Jürgen Habermas are chosen to complement the theoretical notions outlined by the philosophers and educationalists mentioned. Moreover, Habermas offers a unique perspective from which to view youth work and understand the educational outcomes to which the policy, literature and practice point. Therefore, it is from this context that the following section will delineate his thinking and illustrate how some of his ideas can be applied to the youth work context. While it is difficult to assert one theoretical perspective over another the following section posits that Habermas' views on education add an extra dimension to the study. Furthermore, applying these ideas to youth work generates a perspective which currently does not exist and has the potential to inspire. The Habermasian viewpoint helps to frame youth work as an emancipatory education yet also recognises the instrumental and practical nature of the inherent learning processes. It is therefore from this basis that Habermas has been chosen as a lens through which to view youth work.

Habermas: A Unifying Theory of Learning

Habermas (b. 1929) the political scientist, offers a complementary and potentially unifying, perspective from which to examine the purpose of youth work. While Habermas' writing on education is limited there are a number of theoretical concepts which have been utilised by educational thinkers. His theoretical concepts as they relate to knowledge and human interests, and especially the theory of communicative action, offer a philosophical framework for understanding the purpose of the 4 key youth work processes outlined. This section will therefore review these Habermasian ideas and supplement the literature outlined in this study.

Habermas (1972) outlines three distinct categories relating to processes of inquiry, which he connects to the learner's interests. These three interests, sometimes referred to as 'learning domains' (Calleja 2014), are differentiated as the technical cognitive interest, practical interest and emancipatory cognitive interest. Though Habermas' original ideas related more to the ontological considerations of research these three interests have been adopted as a way of understanding learning from a range of educational writers (Ewert 1991; Rogers 1996; Mezirow 2003; Milligan et al., 2011; Meslop 2011; Expósito 2014; Field 2015). Alan Rogers (1996), writing about perspectives of learning, aligns Habermas with the educational thinking of Carl Rogers and Paulo Freire. The comparison extends the Habermasian idea to three kinds of learning: instrumental, practical and emancipatory suggesting a hierarchy exists, placing emancipation at the top (Rogers 1996). Ewert (1991) refers to these domains as types of knowledge. In the youth work context all three types of learning are present.

Instrumental learning refers to the *"acquisition of skills and understanding needed to control the world we live in"* (Rogers 1996, p.15). In this type of learning, testing out whether something is true or what it purports to be is the essence (Mezirow 2003). Habermas (1972) refers to this instrumental interest as a positivistic or scientific approach to knowledge acquisition. Furthermore, Calleja (2014) suggests this approach produces strategic action on behalf of the learner. While the youth work processes outlined place little emphasis on instrumental learning there is evidence of a growing trend to support learning in this way. The latest policy framework 'Priorities for Youth' (Department of Education 2013) promotes youth work which assists young people in gaining 5 GCSEs or more. While instrumental, it is currently unclear of the extent to which youth workers will be held to account for this policy. In this study the attitudes and perceptions of such an outcome focussed and instrumental policy should become evident. It may become evident, as Field (2015) found, that the tension between the learner's interest and the employing organisation may be incompatible. The suggestion here is that the organisation reduces their interest in the learner and places more emphasis in the outcomes. The priority in the youth work literature for an experiential, relationship based, dialogical and participative learning experience with young people is surely under threat if the focus turns to instrumental outputs and outcomes.

In contrast, communicative learning refers to that which is learnt across interpersonal relationships and communication. Carr and Kemmis (2004 [1986], p.135) state that *"the 'practical interest' generates knowledge in the form of interpretive understanding which can inform and guide practical judgment"*. Habermas (1972) refers to this learning as practical in nature involving the

discourse generated between people. According to Aber (1991) this aspect of knowledge is developed through human interaction and language enabling people to understand each other and reach consensus in their decisions. He suggests that the concern is with the 'what' of human existence (Aber 1991, p. 127). Endeavouring to arrive at deeper understanding of an issue through conversation and discourse is the goal of such learning. As Mezirow (2000 cited in Calleja 2011, p.128) puts it

> *"communicative learning requires that we assess the meanings behind the words; the coherence, truth, and appropriateness of what is being communicated; the truthfulness and qualifications of the speaker; and the authenticity of expressions of feelings"*.

At the heart of communicative learning Habermas (1989-90) recognises the need for conditions such as equality and emphasises that the relationship is un-coerced. With such conditions present, open democratic dialogue enables consensus to emerge (Calleja 2011). As with youth work and informal education, getting to a consensus through a participative conversation within a relationship that is built upon mutual respect is core within the processes outlined. However, just how or if this is manifest within the research will become evident.

The third Habermasian human learning interest is that of emancipation. While Habermas (1972, 1987) is primarily concerned with a critical theory and emancipation on a macro level he also emphasises the personal. Emancipatory learning involves increased self-understanding and awareness along with the *"transformation of cultural and personal presuppositions"* (Rogers 1996, p.15)

which affect the actions of the individual. Calleja (2011, p.128) suggests that the involvement of critical self-reflection is a key component which enables the learner to understand what is constraining the way they see the world and the way they think, feel and act. Reflection is built into the youth work processes outlined in their entirety and is perceived as an enabler for new learning to take place. The emancipatory emphasis in youth work is evident in much of the writing discussed in this review of literature with freedom being emphasised in the work of Carl Rogers and Freiberg (1994) in their writing on the learning relationship, and with Paulo Freire (1973) on dialogue.

Although Habermas (1972, 1984, 1987) writes little on education and learning, communicative action offers an alternative, integrative and unifying perspective for youth work. Of the four youth work processes Jürgen Habermas is most evidently connected to the first three. His emphasis relates to the learning relationship, dialogue and participation but experiential learning is not so evident at first glance. However, Mezirow (2003), Calleja (2014), Walker (2011) and Field (2015), make the connections between experience, learning and the Habermasian view. Habermas recognises the tension between the 'life-world' (human experience and social action) and the 'system' (Dews 1999 cited in Field 2015). Connecting to the work of Dewey (1916) the experience of the learner, as it relates to work, interaction and power (Calleja 2014; Field 2015), creates an environment for learning. Furthermore, Walker (2011) postulates a similar thought to that of the experiential learning theory of Kolb (2014). The Habermasian view, Walker (2011) suggests, promotes taking apart theory for a critical reconstruction. This approach is easily connected to the learning cycles of

Kolb (2015), Jarvis (2012) and the reflective thinking ideas of Argyris and Schön (1996).

While it is thought that *"Habermas lacks concepts tested in empirical research"* (Forchtner and Schneickert 2016, p.304) his theoretical perspective adds to this discussion on learning and youth work. Furthermore, Lovat (2013, p.82) recognises the potential for these Habermasian ideas to *"deal with the intellectual, social, emotional, moral and spiritual good"*. These aspirations are also inherent within the informal educational processes of relationship building, conversation and dialogue, participation and experiential learning. Habermas' (1972, 1984, 1987, 1990) theory of communicative and moral consciousness emphasises the importance of working together to reach a perspective with which all agree. This emphasis on consensus fits well with the processes upon which youth work focuses. Thomassen (2010, p.11) summarises the basic premise of Habermas succinctly - *"for Habermas, the question 'what is normatively right?' cannot be answered by the philosopher but should be answered through discourses among real people".* In this case, 'real' young people trying to navigate their way through life aided by the youth worker. As Young (2006, p.59) suggests the youth worker's role is *"moral philosophising through which they make sense of the world, increasingly integrate their values actions and identity, and take charge of themselves as empowered human beings"*. This study will help in determining whether youth workers perceive it in this way and if the processes in which they engage assist in achieving such a purpose.

While the literature review has outlined and explored youth work's problem of definition, defining characteristics and four key processes, Habermas offers a

unifying theoretical perspective. His view that learning and development is brought about through communicative action and is emancipatory, aligns well with the processes which youth work promotes. The study will ultimately seek to determine if youth workers see it similarly.

Section Two: Methodology

The following section not only articulates the rationale and thinking which underpins the research methodology of the study but also shows how it was undertaken. The chapter frames the context for the study and discusses the research question, underlying assumptions, the research design, the specific methods employed and the ethical considerations. This research methodology involves more than a discussion on methods alone but rather *"provides the reasons for using a particular recipe"* (Clough and Nutbrown 2012, p.25). Therefore, the recipe and its constituent ingredients will be the focus of this chapter.

While the methodology will be discussed in detail within this chapter the following serves as a concise overview of the methodological process. Completion of the literature review enabled the development of a research question. This question evolved to become: What do professionally qualified youth workers understand about the purpose, processes and theory underpinning their practice? An interpretive paradigm, which drew on constructionism and phenomenology, was deemed most relevant for such a question. The design frame was defined as a case study with phenomenological features. The research methods employed for this case study were focus groups and interviews. In total, 32 participants engaged in the study; 8 in the focus groups and 24 in the interviews. Focus groups enabled a testing out of the specific questions and acted as a springboard for the interviews. Subsequently, the interviews facilitated deeper discussion and interrogation of the respondents' perspectives. This data was then analysed within a six-phase process to arrive at the findings. Throughout

the process, ethical considerations were deemed paramount and are discussed as the final aspect of this section.

Aim and Objectives

Following the literature review, an aim with objectives was formulated to determine the shape of the study.

Aim:

- To understand youth workers perspectives on the purpose of their work and associated ideas about the processes and theory in which they engage

Objectives:

Methodological:

- Identify key individuals that will be able to participate in the research
- Explore appropriate methods of collecting data
- Carry out data collection with groups and individuals of experienced and professionally qualified youth workers across the sector

Empirical:

- Explore how youth workers perceive the purpose of youth work
- Outline defining features of youth work
- Explore the processes by which youth workers engage young people
- Investigate the theoretical suppositions of youth workers
- Develop a typology of theory and experience utilised within the youth work sector

Chapter Eight: Research Methodology and Design

As has been discussed, the definition and meaning of youth work is contested, and as Davies (2010, p.1) states, "*has always been a matter of serious debate"*. This debate has produced ambiguous and subjective understandings about the purpose of youth work. As examined in the review of literature, defining youth work is a complex task with a range of meanings, emphases and defining characteristics being expressed. However, understanding and reviewing the processes in which youth workers engage helps in the distillation and clarification of its purpose. These processes of relationship building, conversation and dialogue, participation and experiential learning are drivers in achieving the purpose of youth work. Yet, from my thirty-five years of experience in the field of youth work it is not so clear how youth workers understand these processes and if they, as professionals, make the same or even similar connections. Therefore, the intention of this study is to identify how youth workers understand the purpose of their work with young people and to ascertain the correlations, if any, with the processes identified.

The Research Question

Arriving at a research question was an arduous task with many ideas and perspectives emanating from the literature review. White (2017) suggests that the research question should come from a deep investigation of the literature pertaining to the subject being studied. Thomas (2017) argues that while there may be a question at the beginning of the study, this should be revised after the literature review. Either way, arriving at a research question is a difficult process (White 2017, p.39).

In the initial phase of the study, exploring the relationship between these youth work processes and the purpose of youth work from the perspective of youth work practitioners became the primary focus of my research question. Initially, the following question emanated from the literature review: What is the relationship between four (as outlined above) key youth work processes and the purpose of youth work? However, this question changed as the research evolved. Through discussion with supervisors, further reading and analysis of initial data, it became clear that the study was exploring something more than the relationship between the four processes and the purpose. The investigation involved analysis of how youth workers related to the theoretical basis of youth work as presented in the literature. As such, the research question evolved to explore aspects of youth work's written epistemology and, considering that, understand how youth workers perceived the epistemological basis for their practice. This is summed up in the following question**: What do professionally qualified youth workers understand about the purpose, processes and theory underpinning their practice?** This involved an investigation of their views on the clarity of youth work's purpose, its distinctiveness, the processes by which workers engage young people and their theoretical perspectives.

The findings from this research question ascertained how the subjective realities and assumptions of youth workers correlate with the ideas presented in the literature review. Ultimately, the study focused on how youth workers relate to the written epistemology and the theoretical base outlined in the literature review. Given this context, and to arrive at an appropriate research methodology and design, several considerations were necessary. These considerations are

outlined in the following chapter forming the basis for the empirical data collection and analysis phase of the study.

The Research Paradigm

The first consideration was that of the research paradigm. Kuhn (1970 cited Cottrell 2014) coined the term 'paradigm' which refers to the overarching set of assumptions or framework of the research. These assumptions relate to how the social and material world is perceived; how knowledge is acquired and how truth is understood (Thomas 2009; Cohen et al., 2011). Often referred to as ontological and epistemological assumptions, these basic philosophical questions concern both the researcher and the phenomenon or subject being researched, fundamentally relating to the best way *"to think about and study the social world"* (Thomas 2009, p.77). The ontological assumptions within this research refer to the nature of the reality (Cohen et al., 2011) regarding 'what' is being studied (Thomas 2009). Epistemological assumptions consequently relate to the question; *"how do we know about the world that we have defined ontologically?"* (ibid., p.87). Grappling with these two suppositions formed the basic paradigm for the research.

Ontologically, the study was concerned with the phenomenon called youth work, endeavouring to discover its definition and purpose. Moreover, epistemologically the research endeavoured to know how youth workers perceive the purpose of youth work, how they have constructed their knowledge and the connections they make to the processes involved in their practice. As has been outlined, the literature review has arrived at a range of definitions and understandings of youth work. Nonetheless, it is difficult to see how youth workers understand this phenomenon. The subjective and unwieldy nature of youth work practice makes

it difficult to be concrete and assured of a definition. Therefore, this study sought to ascertain the ‘what’ (ontological assumptions) and ‘how’ (epistemological assumptions) of youth work from the perspective of youth workers.

In social research, paradigms are broadly divided into two categories: scientific, often referred to as positivist, and the more subjective perspective of interpretivism (Cottrell 2014, p.97). These perspectives in turn gravitate either towards quantitative (positivism) or qualitative (interpretivism) methods of research. Quantitative research is rooted in the world of physical science and has evolved from the work of the 18th century philosopher Auguste Comte, the founding father of positivism (Thomas 2017). It is also referred to as the ‘systematic’, ‘scientific’ or ‘positivist’ approach (Kumar 2011, p.14). Within the positivist tradition the prevalent belief is that social phenomena can be researched and measured in a similar manner to physical science in the sense that universal laws, social facts and theories can be investigated in an empirical way (Silverman 2014). Conversely, qualitative research pertains to assumptions which are more subjective and transient. This second perspective recognises that social phenomena can often be difficult to measure due to the subjective nature of that which is being researched. Whilst educational and social research literature places significant emphasis on both quantitative and qualitative approaches, this section will highlight why this study necessitated a more qualitative focus.

Initially deciding on a paradigm seemed straightforward, however ascertaining the truth or reality of a social phenomenon such as youth work is rather more complex. Indeed Gage (1989) and Oakley (1999) draw attention to the ‘paradigm wars’ existing in the 1980s/90s which highlight the tension between qualitative

and quantitative methods of research and the fundamental ontological and epistemological differences which exist across a range of philosophical perspectives. The foundational stages of the study gravitated towards quantitative methods and subsequently entertained the possibility of a mixed methods approach. However, in undertaking the literature review regarding the purpose of youth work and the processes involved therein, I realised that my interest lay in the more subjective perspectives and rationale of youth workers. Furthermore, interpreting how they view youth work and understanding how they construct their reality led me to a view that a qualitative perspective and methodology was more suited to this nature of research. This analysis was compounded by Silverman's (2014) definition of qualitative research which suggests that the concepts and models held by the researcher, and the practical reasoning of those being studied, make a significant contribution to understanding the 'social fact' being studied. Broadly the qualitative research paradigms of interpretivism and particularly constructionism resonate with this study of youth work. Within this research, the nature of the topic, the experience and practice of the youth workers being interviewed and differing perspectives on the processes involved in youth work, illustrate multiple subjective dimensions which necessitate exploration through a more qualitative paradigm.

Theoretical Perspectives and the Research Paradigm

While the two philosophical perspectives of interpretivism and constructionism relate to this study, a third perspective of phenomenology was also worthy of consideration. The following section will outline the three perspectives and demonstrate their relevance to the study.

Stemming from the work of the sociologist Max Weber (1864 -1920), interpretivism emphasises the need for a different scientific approach to that used in natural science offering a contrasting epistemological perspective to positivism (Bryman 2008; Cottrell 2014). This qualitative approach aims at *"understanding the phenomenon or event under study from the interior"* (Flick 2009, p.65). Weber (1947 cited Bryman 2008) conceptualises this understanding as 'verstehen'. The basis of an interpretivist approach

> *"argues that people – unlike atoms, chemicals or most non-human forms of life – interpret (make sense of) their environment and themselves in ways that are shaped by the particular cultures in which they live"* (Hammersley 2007, p. 81).

The essence of this study was to understand how youth workers interpret and comprehend the purpose of their work. While this may be perceived as a simple endeavour, influences such as culture (or sub cultural), social contexts, educational background and epistemological assumptions of the workers all contribute to their understanding and perception. While there are objective measurements such as National Occupational Standards (2014) and subject benchmarks for youth work (QAA 2009), studying the subjective reality of the youth workers delivering practice, and interpreting how they see their work and the processes therein, gained deeper insights and understanding of this contested practice of youth work. Indeed, as Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012, p.41) suggest, the task of the researcher is to find multiple interpretations in *"order to understand wherein the differences between experience and interpretation lie".* Articulating this enabled the researcher to delve into the

ontological and epistemological assumptions of the subjects, unearthing their version of youth work's purpose.

The second perspective of constructionism has its roots in the related psychological research term of constructivism, and is broadly interpretivist in origin (Hammersley 2007, p.93). Bryman (2008) argues that constructionism is an ontological position whereby knowledge is viewed as indeterminate. From this vantage point social phenomena are constructed through social interaction and are constantly being revised (ibid., p. 19). While Silverman (2014) argues that constructionism is a specific research discipline and framework, there are also general principles and techniques which make it relevant to a qualitative and interpretive study of this nature. The focus within this discipline is on the *"rhetorical and constructive aspects of knowledge: that is, the realisation that facts are socially constructed in particular contexts"* (ibid., p.26). Endeavouring to discover how youth workers have constructed their knowledge about youth work was a primary concern and as such, aspects of this constructionist approach were compatible with the aim and direction of the study.

Phenomenology, like constructionism, is rooted in the interpretivist tradition (Creswell 2007). While phenomenologists vary in their perspectives, Curtis (1978 cited Cohen et al., 2011) suggests there are three points of general agreement about their philosophical viewpoint. These views stress the importance of subjective consciousness which is active and bestows meaning on a phenomenon, and that certain structures to consciousness exist, through which knowledge is gained (ibid.). The basic premise of the phenomenological perspective is that common sense is questionable and that there is a need to look beyond the *"details of everyday life"* (Cohen et al., 2011, p.18) to find out

what is happening. Furthermore, Heidegger (1962 cited Smith et al., 2009) suggests that phenomenology is concerned with that which could be disguised or latent. With youth work and particularly youth workers, there are sets of assumptions, ideas, feelings and theories about their work which are latent and in need of discovery. This research therefore sought to explore these assumptions examining how the phenomenon of youth work is understood.

In summary, this qualitative study is primarily rooted in the broader interpretivist research tradition, borrowing ideas and principles from both constructionism and phenomenology. While interpretivism is viewed as a paradigm (Thomas 2009; Cohen et al., 2011; Bryman 2008), constructionism and phenomenology both straddle research paradigms (Hammersley 2007; Denscombe 2007) and specific design frames (Silverman 2014; Creswell 2007; Smith et al., 2009). This eclectic approach was chosen to add depth to the study and enrich the research. Utilising ideas from phenomenology and constructionism was an attempt to make the research more rigorous and reliable. In turn, these perspectives led to qualitative methods of investigation and analysis affecting the design frame employed in the research.

Design Frame and Methods Employed

While philosophical paradigms are useful in articulating the perspective and assumptions of the researcher, Hammersley (1992 cited Silverman 2014, p.27) suggests the *"retreat into paradigms effectively stultifies debate and hampers progress".* Therefore, it is important to move on to the specifics of the design and outline the pragmatic issues for the research itself. While the paradigm focuses on the assumptions underlying the research (Cotrell 2014) the design frame is about the scaffold, plan and structure (Thomas 2009) of the study. The design

frame outlines both what is involved in the research and articulates how it will be conducted. As this study does not easily fit into a specific design framework, the logic and rationale for choosing to utilise various elements from two approaches will be demonstrated.

This research was broadly couched in the design frame of a case study focussing on youth work in Northern Ireland. According to Kumar (2014, p.155) a case study design is based upon an assumption that the case (or cases) being studied can provide *"insight into the events or situation from where the case has been drawn".* In this instance it is the perspectives and opinions of youth workers and their epistemological assumptions about the purpose of youth work which are at the heart of this study. Youth work is not a narrowly defined community, institution or individual as case studies are traditionally characterised (Flick 2009, 2015), but is a community of practitioners with varying perspectives on similar issues and practice. Within this case study I explored and questioned the perceptions and assumptions of the everyday experience of youth workers. This is eloquently referred to by Oakeshott (1933 cited Clough and Nutbrown 2012, p.25) as the *"arrest of experience".* As such, arresting the experience of youth work practitioners was another concern within this study.

The second research design frame which was drawn upon is that of phenomenology. While phenomenology is often referred to as a paradigm (Davies 2007; Bryman 2008; Kumar 2011) both Denscombe (2007, 2010) and Creswell (2007) argue that it is a research design frame or approach alongside such frameworks as case studies, ethnography and surveys. As a research design frame, phenomenology explores how people *"interpret events and, literally make sense of their experiences"* (Denscombe 2007, p. 76). There is an

overlap between the focus of a case study and that of phenomenology, in that they both concentrate on the experience. Phenomenology, however, has a stronger alignment to individuals, as in this research, while case studies tend to focus on *"groups of individuals participating in an event or activity or organisation"* (Creswell 2007, p. 143). While I was primarily interested in the individual's experience and insights of youth work, the research was exploring the phenomenon of youth work as experienced by youth work practitioners. This necessitated a more specific approach to that of a broader case study. Therefore, the researcher drew upon the two design frameworks and associated research methods.

Thomas (2009, p.140) argues that it is *"absolutely fine"* to mix methods and design frames in social research but it is not recommended to mix the ontological or epistemological assumptions behind differing design frames. However, it is suggested that utilising various elements of differing design frames enhances the validity and reliability of the research as the subjects are being examined through differing lenses (ibid., p.141). These frameworks were similarly used within this research, but drawing upon the varying methods of each design frame enabled greater depth in the research, and subtly influenced the sampling strategy and the methods used in gathering and interpreting the data.

Sampling Strategy or Selecting Research Participants

Sampling is the process of selecting those who are to be involved in the research and assuring that there is, as Flick (2015, p.106) suggests, the *"right cases for the study".* Engagement with the right people was a central task to this study. However, due to its positivistic overtones and its use by scientific experimentalists, Thomas (2009) argues that the notion of sampling within an

interpretative paradigm is ludicrous. A sample, he suggests, should be in *"some way reflective of the whole"* (ibid., p.104). Moreover, due to the low number of participants typically used in qualitative and interpretivist research, it is extremely difficult to be representative of the 'whole'. Being able to generalise and represent the full picture is an ideal that is difficult to achieve within an interpretive research paradigm. Nonetheless, Larsson (2009 cited Cohen et al., 2011, p.242) suggests that sampling is made possible by maximising the range of a sample's characteristics, drawing the sample from a wide context or in seeing similar patterns across the data. These factors were considered in selecting the research participants as is evident in the pen pictures of the respondents (appendix 7).

Thomas' (2009) argument is significant but it remains that selecting the subjects for research and adopting a particular strategy are important, as the quality of the entire research can stand or fall on this process (Cohen et al., 2011, p.143). While the nature of qualitative research is often organic and flexible there is still a need to identify who or what will be the subject of the research (Hammersley 2007). In making this decision, Cohen et al., (2011) identify five key factors where judgements should be made regarding sampling. The following section will outline the rationale and judgements made regarding these five factors of sample size, parameters and representativeness, access to the sample, the strategy and the kind of research being undertaken (ibid., p.143).

The community youth work sector in Northern Ireland involves a finite group of people. However, without a register of workers, there are considerable difficulties in determining who is employed within the sector and the specifications of their role. Furthermore, youth work in Northern Ireland has an unwieldy structure with

both formal and informal networks that inform, govern and support the sector. This also made it difficult to establish the extent of the profession. Initially, the lack of a register and unwieldy structure made it problematic in ascertaining who should be involved in the study and why. However, reviewing the literature, determining the research question and establishing the research paradigm enabled a more targeted approach. This narrowed the parameters of the research to professionally qualified (JNC recognised) youth workers across the sector. It was assumed that these workers would have a greater connection to the purpose and theory of youth work and the processes involved.

The number of workers across the sector is contested and uncertain. Nonetheless, data exists to give an indication of the figures involved in youth work practice. In the most recent audit of the Northern Ireland youth sector work force, Courtney (2011) estimated that there were 28,759 workers (23,893 volunteers and 3,439 paid staff). This included over 900 full-time paid staff with around 8% being involved in administration activities. He estimated that one quarter of the workforce (776) possess a JNC recognised professional qualification. Although exploring differing data, YCNI (2015) purport 300 full-time paid workers in Education Authority, registered provision. Moreover, in research by McCready and Morgan (2014), 274 professionally qualified workers participated in an online survey. Around 300 active full-time youth workers seem to be the most accurate number but there could be almost 800 with a professional JNC recognised qualification.

As this research was focussed on epistemological assumptions of professionally qualified workers it was this grouping of around 800 in which the research was concentrated. However, the depth of responses desired from the participants, the

interpretive, qualitative methodological approach chosen, and the sheer quantity of transcribed data impacted upon the sample size. Due to the time and capacity of the researcher there was a limit to the number of participants that could be drawn from the, almost 800, professionally qualified cohort. The research was therefore small scale in nature and focussed on a manageable number of respondents. In the end, 32 professionally qualified youth workers participated in the research.

Consequently, a small scale, qualitative study with a non-probability sampling strategy was employed. Non-probability sampling, while having limitations, is particularly useful for case studies and small-scale research, and when generalisable findings are unnecessary (Cohen et al., 2011). The sample size within a non-probability study is not determined by a mathematical equation as with quantitative research, but rather, it is dependent on the researcher's judgement in reaching a saturation point (Kumar 2011, 2014), when there is little new information or *"it is negligible"* (Kumar 2014, p.248). Therefore, while there are some notions of an ideal sample size for qualitative research (Guest et al., 2006; Baker and Edwards 2012), this is frequently indeterminate prior to the commencement of the field work.

Unlike quantitative research, where the selection of cases or subjects is chosen randomly, qualitative studies have a need for judgement (Kumar 2011). The selection of specific people for the research requires judgemental criteria in ascertaining who is best to answer the question (Flick 2015). Kumar (2014) identifies six non-random/non-probability sampling designs which are broadly referred to as purposive or judgemental sampling. The selection of subjects for the research therefore necessitated the researcher to choose the subjects

because of the purpose of the research. A set of criteria was established to determine who might be engaged. This involved choosing youth workers who had a minimum of 3 years practice experience, who were professionally qualified at diploma, degree or post-graduate level. While there were no quotas used in the sampling selection process, attention was also given to gender and urban/rural mix of the participants.

It is not possible to gain the views of the entire youth work sector nor even of the 800 professionally qualified workers. However, this type of qualitative study required careful consideration of the sample. Therefore, along with the criteria outlined above a mix of expert, convenience and snowball sampling was used. Regarding expert sampling, this meant choosing subjects based on the expertise, range and depth of experience and their position. There was also an element of convenience sampling utilised whereby the researcher depended on the availability of the subject. Thirdly, snowball sampling was employed to investigate a potential subject mentioned by another research candidate. This sampling strategy allowed for the collection of data from appropriate sources that enabled the provision of *"complete and diverse information"* (Kumar 2014, p.248).

Trustworthy and Authentic Sampling

Within an interpretative paradigm the notion of sampling is deemed problematic (Thomas 2009). Therefore, it was necessary to outline a clear rationale for selecting research subjects and discussing the context from which they were drawn. In summary, the research subjects were selected through a process of purposive sampling focussing on professionally qualified workers, with three or more years of post-qualifying experience. Besides these targeted factors,

attention was paid to a semblance of balance regarding gender, community background, seniority and urban/rural split of the targeted grouping. In a small-scale study of this size it was difficult to mitigate bias, but the strategy employed went some way to creating a sample which had a blend of backgrounds, perspectives and geographical spread. These criteria added greater objectivity to the sample selection process, supporting the trustworthiness and authenticity of the data.

In positivist quantitative research, reliability and validity on the data collected, both in terms of the sample and the methods employed, are deemed paramount (Thomas 2009). However, in an interpretative qualitative study of this nature alternative terminology is helpful in judging the outcomes of the research. Kumar (2014) cites Guba and Lincoln's (1994) alternative framework. Rather than internal and external validity, credibility and transferability are used, while dependability and conformability replace the terms of reliability and objectivity (Kumar 2014, p.219).

The credibility of the study depended upon how respondents, or, more generally, the youth work field, perceived the findings of the research as true. Furthermore, the transferability of the study refers to the extent to which the study can be "*generalised or transferred to other contexts or settings"* (Trochim and Donnelly 2007 cited Kumar 2014, p.219). Of course, it may be deemed more robust to have statistical, generalisable findings but in sampling of this nature it is non-probabilistic (Guest et al., 2006). Therefore, the research, while not generalisable, attempted to ascertain whether the findings were both credible and transferable to the wider youth work context.

The dependability of the study tested whether the same results would be achieved from talking to numerous research subjects (ibid.). While difficult to ascertain, interviewing candidates until a level of data saturation was achieved made the research much more dependable. Finally, confirmability *"refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others"* (Trochim and Donnelly 2007 cited Kumar 2014, p.219). While there is built-in flexibility within qualitative research of this nature, the consistency of the data collection techniques helped to assure confirmability. Ergo the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the research hinges upon the methodology used and the data collection methods employed.

Data Collection Methods

Choosing the 'right tools for the job' is euphemistically used by Thomas (2009) to imply the importance of selecting appropriate methods of data collection for qualitative and quantitative research. While there is an overlap between the methods used in qualitative and quantitative research (Kumar 2014, p. 192), broad agreement exists in the types of data collection methods necessary for an interpretative qualitative study of this nature (Creswell 2007; Hamersley 2007; Thomas 2009; Cohen et al., 2011; Denscombe 2014; Kumar 2014). Two prominent methods utilised in the gathering of qualitative data are focus groups and interviews. While other methods such as observation, narrative histories and documents can be used (Kumar 2014), the purpose of this study was to elicit perspectives, subjective analysis and qualitative information from youth workers. Therefore, focus groups and interviews were more suited to this study as they enabled subjects to tell their story and speak of their perspective more freely, creating *"rich data"* (Smith et al., 2009, p.56).

Focus Groups

The focus group method is a form of group interview which facilitates *"a collective rather than an individual view"* (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 436). Focus groups are particularly useful if the research will benefit from enhanced interaction and communication between the subjects (Creswell 2007). This method utilises the group dynamics (Denscombe 2010) within a climate of trust (Denscombe 2014). The benefits of this type of group interview are twofold. First, focus groups generate discussion which reveals *"the meanings that people read into the discussion topic and how they negotiate those meanings"* (Flick 2009, p.204). The second strength highlights the diversity and difference of opinion expressed through such a process (ibid.). A third strength in using focus groups is the efficiency in talking to a range of subjects. The focus groups aided in gaining a broad grasp of the issues faced by the eight people in two hours of investigation, rather than almost 10 hours of interviewing individuals making it much less labour intensive.

There are drawbacks in using focus groups due to the data being difficult to make generalisable, quantify and analyse succinctly (Cohen et al., 2011). However, as this was a qualitative study whereby the purpose was to gain access to the ontological and epistemological assumptions of youth workers, focus groups were an appropriate data collection method. Within this study focus groups facilitated youth workers to share their perspectives and interact with each other in a way that was familiar to them; that is, group work. Their behaviour, comments and insights were observed and analysed using audio visual equipment to enable deeper analysis of the interactions. Although there is no ideal number for conducting focus groups, the literature suggests between four and twelve (Kumar 2014; Cohen et al., 2011; Savin-Baden and Howell Major

2013). In total, twelve to fifteen people were contacted for each of the two focus groups.

A schedule of semi structured questions was developed as a framework for each focus group (appendix 4). This facilitated the group members to discuss the purpose of their work and the processes in which they engaged. Flick (2009) stresses the importance of producing informality in discussion which when implemented, enabled dynamic interaction between members and helped to test out the premise of the study. The focus of the discussion was on the perceptions, thinking and understanding of the purpose of youth work and how clearly it is understood. The second aspect of the discussion focused on the four processes of - relationship building; conversation and dialogue; participation and experiential learning. The dynamic processes in operation within this data collection method not only gains insight to *"what people think but also to why they hold those views"* (Denscombe 2007, p.179). Finally, a basic form was filled out by each of the participants to indicate their preferences or priority given to the four processes. This form enabled the researcher to gain further insight into their perceptions away from the camera being used to record the sessions.

While there was a reasonable turn out within one of the groups (five), the second focus group had only three people present. Nonetheless, rather than being a group interview, whereby each candidate would be interviewed in a group context, the focus group fostered a dynamic of interaction with a range of perspectives evident in each cohort. Each group was marked by a diversity of gender, urban/rural mix and statutory and voluntary youth sector representation. Although the differing focus group size could have impacted on the findings, the insights and perceptions of the two groupings showed similar trends and

patterns. The focus groups enabled discussion of the wider themes explored within the literature review and formed a basis for the interviews.

As has been stated, focus groups are utilised for several reasons, but in this case, they were used to gain baseline information (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013) about youth work and an understanding of the *"attitudes, opinions or perceptions"* (Kumar 2011, p.73) towards the research topic. Moreover, the focus groups assisted the research process to form 'question guides' for the interview process (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013). The material which was derived from the focus groups helped to frame the interview schedule (appendix 5) and feed into the second phase of the empirical data collection. This two-fold strategy added to the dependability of the entire data set as the focus groups were verified or refuted by the interviews. The focus groups acted as a springboard for conducting the subsequent research and created a baseline understanding of the issues.

The table below (Table 8.1) shows the breakdown of the two focus groups and some of the variables. Although this is a non- probabilistic qualitative study, these variables show an attempt at gaining a balanced sample across the two groups of people.

Focus Groups	Gender	Religion or Background	Experience	Location	Sector
8 respondents	5 males 3 females	6 Catholic 2 Protestant	2 - 3-10 2 - 11-20 4 - 21+	3 Belfast 4 Non-Belfast 1 Regional	3 Statutory 5 Voluntary

Table 8.1 Focus group profile

Interviews

Adding a further data collection method onto focus groups built another layer of credibility, dependability and confirmability (Kumar 2014) into the study. This process is referred to as methodological triangulation, whereby more than one form of data collection method is used to increase the reliability of the study (Thomas 2009 p.111). In this case the second method used was that of the interview.

Smith et al., (2009, p.57) describe the interview as a purposeful conversation, which is implicitly informed by the research question. The research question was central to the interview as it sought to unearth the youth worker's understanding. The interview process enabled the worker to reflect upon, think about and articulate their perspective on the purpose of youth work. Rather than ticking a box or writing a pithy statement, the rich data collected from this method was derived from the open-ended nature of the semi structured interview.

Thomas (2009, p.164) argues that this format, as opposed to the structured or unstructured interview, provides the *"best of both worlds"*. However, he also recognises the need for preparedness and an interview schedule (appendix 5).

Rather than being a list of specific questions, as with the structured interview, the schedule provided a framework for the interview and highlighted the issues that the researcher wanted to address. The interview schedule was based upon the findings of both the literature review and the material from the focus groups. In qualitative interviewing the interviewee's point of view is central and allows for rambling and asides throughout the process (Bryman 2008). This study lent itself to dialogue and interjection in order to get closer to the true perceptions of the youth workers.

In semi structured interviews the interviewer seeks elaboration and clarification on the answers given, enabling "*more latitude to probe"* (May 2011, p.134), thereby making the interview more conversational. This data collection method unearthed more than fact, permitting a fuller exploration of the topic and therefore generated and deployed meaning (ibid., p.135). How youth workers assign meaning and make sense of their work was explored, wherein the practitioners had an opportunity to delve into their understanding and perception of the topic and enter into a dialogue with the interviewer. While the schedule gave a framework for conducting the interview, the semi-structured nature of the process allowed for deviation from the script. As Thomas (2009, p.166) views it, *"the structure reminds you of your aims and themes, but it does (should) not constrict you".*

The number of interviews suggested for a PhD range vastly from nought to one hundred (Denzim and Doucet in Baker and Edwards 2012). The broad answer given is, it depends (ibid.). Given this ambiguous guidance it was therefore difficult to ascertain how many interviews were necessary for a qualitative study of this nature. Nonetheless, there is broad agreement that interviewing should

cease when there is theoretical saturation, and negligible new ideas are being presented from the subjects (Guest et al., 2006; Baker and Edwards 2012). While this may be a desired outcome, theoretical saturation is a somewhat subjective notion, particularly with semi-structured interviews where asides and digression can always produce new theoretical data. Given this dichotomy, an intention of conducting 22-25 interviews was presented for ethical approval (see appendix 6) to the ethics committee as being an appropriate number of subjects which would reach theoretical saturation. The matrix below (Table 8.2) illustrates the profile of the interviewees.

Interviewees	Gender	Religion	Experience	Location	Sector
24 respondents	12 males 12 females	13 Catholic 11 Protestant	5 – 3-10yrs 11-20yrs 21+ yrs	13 Belfast 6 Non-Belfast 5 regional	14 Voluntary 9 Statutory 1 Independent

Table 8.2 Interviewee profile

Data Processing and Analysis

The processing and analysis of data necessitated considerable thought and planning. According to Kumar (2014, p.317) the type of data processing and analysis employed depends on how the findings will be communicated. He identifies three ways of writing about findings in qualitative research. These are: describing the situation by use of a narrative, identifying main themes and/or, additionally quantifying the frequency of the occurrence to determine the prevalence of the theme (ibid.). This study primarily focused on the second data processing method wherein the focus groups and interviews were scrutinised and analysed to generate themes. Alongside this there was analysis of the frequency of an occurrence to locate the dominance of a word, theme or idea.

All data was recorded using digital recording equipment for the interviews with the addition of videoing the focus groups. The focus groups and interviews were meticulously transcribed to honour the process and notice nuance and emotion. The additional video footage helped to ascertain the depth of feeling expressed and demonstrated the interaction more fully. Each focus group and interview lasted between fifty minutes and an hour and fifteen, as such, the transcription was labour intensive consisting of a minimum of twenty pages per interview. In total there were more than 450 pages of transcribed discussion. The analysis of this dense form of rich data required a thorough and systematic approach.

Once the focus groups and interviews were transcribed the main themes were extracted using the ‘constant comparative method’ (Thomas 2009). This was made possible using NVivo through transferring the transcriptions onto the software package and meticulously sifting through the data to identify pertinent themes, patterns and emphases. While the data analysis strategy is outlined

below, the broad method of data analysis necessitated the reading and re-reading of transcripts to determine the prevalent issues, concerns and subjects generated from each focus group and interview. In turn, these were compared across the entire set of data and, concurrently, the themes were mapped out. This form of coding was used with each transcription in a six-phase approach. In each phase the data was distilled, condensed and coded until the dominant themes emerged.

Prior to the study the researcher was unaware of NVivo software and had not perceived the potential for such a tool in the analysis of data. However, after undertaking training and the experimental use of the software, its potential was recognised. The use of the tool was chosen after much consideration of alternatives. Physically highlighting the transcripts and scribbling notes on the margins may have created a deeper connection with the data (Bazeley 2007). However, the advantages of systematically coding the transcriptions, interrogating the data for word frequency and testing out hunches about patterns with NVivo, was invaluable. While computer literacy was an issue in the early phase of 'learning' NVivo, the perseverance and investment of time helped in the systematic analysis of the data sets.

Analysis of the data in this type of hybrid method which drew on phenomenological approaches and constructionism in the context of a case study, necessitated differing analytical styles. Whilst hybrid, the analysis deserved systematic treatment and a strategy (Bazeley 2009). Therefore, the six-phase process was adopted to add rigour and depth to the process of analysis. This phased approach adapted from Smith et al., (2009) is broadly aligned to the approach of interpretative phenomenological analysis which seeks

to interpret what is being said and draw meaning. The first phase of analysis involved reading and re-reading the data to comprehend the thrust of arguments, insights and perspectives. This involved immersion in the data which led to a fuller understanding of the narrative. The second stage involved open coding which endeavoured to understand the meaning behind different phrases, *"reading between the lines, identifying concepts"* (Bazeley 2007, p.69) and grappling with the potential meaning. In other words, to break open the text (ibid.). The third step in the process involved identifying emergent themes. As the schedules for interviews and focus groups were structured thematically (see interview and focus group schedules, appendix 4 and 5) it is disingenuous to state that these themes simply emerged. However, Bazeley (2009) suggests that this type of priori categorisation is not a problem so long as the researcher is not suggesting that the categories were unanticipated. Therefore, while these categories and themes are aligned with the focus groups and interview questions, several unanticipated responses were also noted.

The fourth stage involved *"searching for connections across the emergent themes"* (Smith et al., 2009 p.92). As with the other stages, close examination of the detail in the transcripts was necessary to ascertain the connections, relationships and polarisation in the data. Developing nodes (NVivo terminology for codes) which categorised the data into broader cross cutting themes saw around sixty themes evident. These were later condensed into the six themes which ultimately emerged. The fifth phase in the analytical process involved moving to the next of the twenty-six cases: as in, the 2 focus groups and 24 interviews, and undertaking the first four steps again. Finally, the sixth step was to interrogate the data to find patterns across all the cases. Through this six-

phase approach the primary *"task of the researcher is to find patterns within those words and to present those patterns for others to inspect while at the same time staying as close to the construction of the world as the participants originally experienced it"* (Maykut and Morehouse 1994, p.18). This strategy helped to inject rigour and systematic analysis into the broader thinking of the respondents. The goal was to be true to the data, but also examine it for broader themes and deeper insights.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for research is often thought to be a box ticking exercise (Silverman 2014). However, given the ethical issues inherent within youth work practice (Banks 2010) and the ethical considerations necessary for research, careful thought has been placed upon the ethics involved in this study. Ethics in research are about the correctness of particular behaviour relating to the study (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013). In the case of this study, ethics permeate each aspect, and necessitate a thoughtful consideration of both the obvious and concealed issues. According to Silverman (2014, p.140), research is not just about doing a job in furtherance of a career but rather, it should be a contribution to the common good and *"protect the people we study".* These two ethical premises have been central concerns throughout.

General principles of ethical conduct in research were upheld, in line with the Ulster University protocol on ethics (Ulster University 2016) and ethical approval was sought and received (appendix 6). Strike (1990 cited in Cohen et al., 2011, p. 98) lists eight ethical principles that should be evident in research which include a respect for privacy and equality, an acknowledgement that the research must be of benefit to those engaging in the study and an adherence to

due process, undertaking reasonable processes throughout. These general principles were deemed sacrosanct within all aspects of the research. This was evident in setting up and conducting interviews and focus groups, conversing with colleagues about the study and in giving feedback to the interviewees about the progress of the study.

The two data collection methods employed in the research raised several ethical issues. Interviewing or engaging with anyone raises ethical issues around the vulnerability of the subject, manipulation of data and welfare of the respondent (Cohen et al., 2011). However, these issues were mitigated as the researcher is a qualified youth worker, has knowledge and experience of interpersonal communication and did not interview young people or vulnerable adults as part of the research.

As youth workers were reflecting on their work with young people, their organisation and their practice, confidentiality was paramount. Anonymity of all participants was promoted and assured from the outset. The entirety of the data collected was password protected within an encrypted system and coded and stored in locked cabinets to assure confidentiality. Personal information and records were kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998 cited Legislation.gov.uk 2015). The secured data was made solely available to supervisors and will be destroyed 10 years after the completed study. Anonymised codes were used for all subjects and youth work agencies involved in the research.

Much consideration was given to the participants' anonymity, the need for confidentiality and informed consent (Cohen et al., 2011). These three

considerations necessitated the development of a subject information sheet, consent forms and protocols for participants (appendix 2 and 3). Care was taken to ensure that all *"participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, prior to the research getting underway"* (Heath et al., 2009, p.23). Reassurance of anonymity for participants in the focus groups and interviews was safeguarded, given that some feedback may reflect current practice issues or dilemmas pertinent to their specific organisation.

The Influence of The Researcher

The final ethical issue to be discussed is that of the influence of the researcher on the research subjects. Early in the process it was recognised that the research was conducted in a field of work which is highly familiar to the researcher, and therefore clear boundaries needed to be established. There are two effects at work in the process which have relevance to this study and without mitigation may affect the legitimacy of the research. These factors involve the interrelated terms of reactivity and reflexivity.

Reactivity is concerned with the effect that conducting a study in itself will influence the outcome of the research. This has sometimes been referred to as the Hawthorne effect (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 185) whereby those being researched perform in a way which is unnatural or staged. While usually related to quantitative research (ibid., p.186) this idea has resonance. Some of the subjects perceived scrutiny from a so-called academic which created a little anxiety or a feeling of being tested. Therefore, respondents were reassured that it was their opinion, perception and understanding which was being sought, not the rightness or wrongness of their answers. This was evident in some respondents more than others, with an apparent deference to the researcher.

While related, the term reflexivity is concerned more directly with the relationship between the researcher and the subject (Richards 2015). This relationship is marked by the perception of both parties of the other. As Davies (2007, p.241) states *"you as a researcher are a player in and an influence upon the situation that you have created"*. Furthermore Holliday (2016) recognises that the researcher and their methods are intertwined in the social world in which they study. The researcher is not neutral. Therefore, wider ethical concerns regarding the relationship between the researcher and the participants were considered. This was perceived to have a negligible effect on the study and, as the researcher knew many of the participants personally, cognisance was taken to disaggregate potential 'conflicts', prejudgements and preconceptions of those involved. Throughout the study there was a need to declare bias, promote objectivity and seek clarity about roles. While this is an interpretative study, where all is open to interpretation, there was need to acknowledge the position, place and power of the researcher. As Hamersley and Atkinson (1983 cited Cohen et al., 2011, p.225) put it *"reflexivity recognises that researchers are inescapably part of the social world that they are researching".* The researcher must therefore be mindful of the subjective nature of the task and the data collected to seek the truth of the matter (Cousin 2010). The introductory chapter of this study has also been presented to show potential researcher bias and conflicts of interest. This was an attempt to illustrate to the reader how the researcher has been embroiled and entangled in the social world of youth work. Being cognisant of the potential bias helped in honestly and truthfully dealing with the responses from the research participants. As Holliday (2016, p.146) indicates the researcher should *"not pretend to escape subjectivity"* but rather *"account for that subjectivity wherever possible".*

Summary of Methodology

This chapter has outlined the rationale, philosophical perspectives and research methods used within this study. While there are many ways to study youth work as a phenomenon, a qualitative perspective was deemed best to address the research questions arising from the literature review. At the outset, the reasoning for utilising an interpretive paradigm was discussed, showing the need to also draw upon constructionist research perspectives. Subsequently, the design frame of a case study with a phenomenological bent was settled upon, with the sampling strategy of such a framework being outlined. The data collection methods of focus groups and interviewing were rationalised, justified and presented. This was followed by a plan of the data analysis strategy. Finally, ethical considerations for the study were discussed and articulated, as a means of mitigating any risk factors which may have been present.

Section Three: Findings, Analysis, Discussion and Conclusions

As Richards (2015, p.211) intimates there is *"no right way to write up research".* Extrapolating findings from the data, interrogating the meaning and deciding upon a presentation structure was inherent in the writing process. In each section there has been an effort to make one point at a time (Silverman 2014). This approach sought to meticulously present the findings in a way which is coherent and true. The subsequent analysis and discussion focuses on what has been found and adds meaning to the research. Presenting qualitative data in this way aids the credibility and transferability of the research (Kumar 2014). This process and emphasis is an attempt to do 'justice to the research' (Richards 2015) and fuse the study.

The first of these two chapters will present a coherent rationale for presenting the findings, followed by the findings from the data itself. While the second chapter presents analysis and discussion of the findings, it is noteworthy that the first chapter also presents a preliminary analysis of the data. Taking data from transcript through coding and into the findings chapter requires scrutiny. In the second chapter of this section, deeper analysis of the data and making sense of what was found is the ultimate concern. This required a deeper exploration of the findings in relation to the literature and discussion of the issues raised. The titles and subtitles within each chapter, while not the same, correspond to each other, adding to coherence and making the connections clearer.

Throughout the section ***"bold italics in quotation marks"*** has been used to signify a direct quote from a research participant and, similarly, *"plain italics"*

refers to a quotation from literature. Codes outlined below have also been used to anonymise participants.

Chapter Nine: Findings

The findings are presented thematically with a *"close reading of what the participants have said"* (Smith et al., 2009, p.112). With over 450 pages of transcribed material from 32 people, in the form of 2 focus groups and 24 interviews, there is much rich data. As such the findings will be presented showing patterns, anomalies and insight. Through a process of rigorous coding utilising NVivo 11 software, several themes were derived. As stated previously, a six-phase approach was employed to present the data necessitating a systematic coding of the transcripts. This strategy enables the findings to show both breadth of insight and commentary of relevant and common themes.

The following six themes were the subsequent outcome from the coding process. As the study is endeavouring to understand how youth workers perceive the purpose of youth work and its distinctive characteristics, this became the first clear theme. As the second aspect of the research involved an interrogation of the processes by which workers operationalise the purpose these are also presented as four themes; the processes of relationship building, conversation and dialogue, participation and experiential learning. Finally, the sixth theme concerned the models and theoretical perspectives which emerged as an overarching emphasis in the data.

Regarding the presentation of each theme, the focus group and interview data has been disaggregated. The focus groups were conducted first to get a sense of broader perspectives and test out the validity of the researcher's premise. The purpose of the focus groups was to lay a foundation for the interviews and establish if the interests and issues of the researcher were valid. Therefore, the datum from the focus groups was not that substantial but formed the basis for

deeper interrogation and investigation of the interviewees' ideas and perceptions. Consequently, the findings from the focus groups are presented first within each section and sub section. Subsequently, the interview findings are presented with a more substantive and in-depth focus.

All data has been anonymised with the focus groups being referred to as 1 and 2. The interviewee respondents have been allocated more specific codes relating to the interview number and three variables. For example, 13MVC refers to interview 13 male, voluntary sector, Catholic. The codes for these variables are highlighted in the following table (Table 9.1). While other variables existed within the coding (appendix 7) they were not found to be significant to the findings.

Male	Female	Voluntary sector	Statutory Sector	Catholic	Protestant
M	F	V	S	C	P

Table 9.1 Anonymised codes for interviewees

Though a high level of reflexivity is acknowledged by the researcher, and subjectivity is interweaved throughout the findings, there is an attempt to honestly reflect on what is being said and present the findings as objectively as possible. Therefore, throughout both the findings and analysis sections there is an attempt, as suggested by Richards (2015, p.220), to thoughtfully evaluate and write about researcher's effect on the outcome of the research. This will include a rationale for choosing what has been presented and articulating the supposed relationship with other data and, in the analysis and discussion chapter, the connections with literature.

Theme One: Ascertaining the Purpose of Youth Work

The focus of this study is to ascertain how youth workers think about the purpose of youth work and whether exploring key processes will gain a more accurate insight into that purpose. Therefore, the initial theme to be presented from the empirical data relates to the purpose of youth work as perceived by the youth worker. There are three sub themes within this wider category regarding youth work's clarity of purpose, the distinctive characteristics and its definition. Understanding the purpose of youth work necessitated a discussion about whether it is clear, what makes it distinctive and how its purpose should be defined. While no formal hypothesis exists within this study there is a premise that the purpose of youth work may lack clarity. Within the initial questions asked of both the focus groups and interviewees the researcher sought to check out the validity of this premise.

Youth Work: Clarity of Purpose

Within the focus groups, ascertaining whether the purpose and definition of youth work lacked clarity was a foundation for the investigation. Both groups spent considerable time reflecting upon whether youth work has a clear purpose. All the focus group respondents agreed that clarity of purpose was an issue, but an inconclusive range of perspectives existed regarding the reasons for their thinking. For example, one respondent intimated that it is not that youth work is ill-defined but that youth workers ***"need to get better about actually expressing what it is we do"*** (focus group 1). Similarly, one focus group member suggested that those ***"without"*** (outside) youth work do not understand its purpose ***"from within*** (inside) ***I think we're quite clear about where we're going"*** (focus group 1). The responses from the focus groups demonstrated that there is an issue about youth work's clarity of purpose although it was

unclear about how, or to what extent this was problematic to practice. This formed the basis for deeper penetration of the issue within the interviews. Conversely, most of the interview respondents had much to say about whether youth work's purpose is clear and why.

Of the interviewees, 21 of the 24 respondents made significant statements about youth work's clarity of purpose. The general comments on clarity proportionally reflected the views from across the differing variables. However, of the 15 interviewees who thought that youth work's purpose has a lack of clarity, 10 substantive views came from the voluntary sector respondents. Furthermore, while there were the same number of women and men interviewed it was evident that slightly more men (N=2) were vocal about the lack of clarity in purpose. Although this is a qualitative study, this is reported as a significant point of interest.

Among the interviewees purporting a lack of clarity two main reasons emerged. The primary reason discussed by respondents related to the broad spectrum of activities, theories, processes and personalities involved within youth work. One respondent stated that it is difficult to define because ***"youth work looks differently for different people"*** (19MVC) and depends on the perspective from which it is being scrutinised. Another stated that ***"because everybody does different things in youth work, it's such a wide variety of things so it's very hard to nail down what the purpose is apart from the vague idea that everybody's trying to develop young people"*** (11FVP). The second set of reasons for youth work's lack of clarity in purpose related to the difficulty in communicating and definition. While relating to the first set of reasons there is a difference. One respondent said ***"I don't think it's lacking in clarity, I think it's***

lacking in communicating the clarity… I think that the communication of it is lost in what is apparently vague, because people use different words to describe the same thing" (7FSC). Likewise, another stated ***"we're not very good at articulating what the actual purpose is and the methodology behind it whereas the more formal*** (education) ***sector can"*** (19MVC). This dichotomy between what youth workers do and how they discuss the purpose of their work was indicative throughout. Another argued that because the policy (*Priorities for Youth, Department of Education*, 2013) does not have a definition, they thought ***"the looseness of it means that it's open to abuse"*** (12MVP). However, this type of ambiguity was not always seen as a weakness as some suggested the freedom gave more opportunities.

The lack of clarity for most respondents was an issue but for a few (N=3) it was perfectly clear, or they thought being unclear was not an issue. This may be about perspective as one respondent said that while youth work for some lacked clarity, it didn't for him as he was a self-declared ***"statutory sector worker"*** (22MSP). Of the three youth workers stating that youth work had clarity of purpose two were from the statutory sector. While unable to make any clear deduction from only two respondents, it is worthy of note. Although the statutory role may have produced greater clarity of purpose one interviewee from the voluntary sector thought passion made the purpose clear. She simply stated, ***"if you're passionate about the job then you should have an awareness of what the purpose is,"*** adding, ***"so if you're aware that you're going in every day to support young people's lives to change, if you're going in with that frame of mind you should know what the purpose is"*** (23FVP)

A few respondents did not seem fazed by the issue of clarity. One respondent mooted ***"I do think there is a lack of clarity, but I don't think it's a bad thing necessarily as well, because I think there needs to be a level of flexibility and informality to it anyway"*** (24MVC). Others suggested that the nature of youth work was so subjective that a lack of clarity was a feature regardless. Another thought prevailed regarding the change in language but not the practice. One interviewee stated, ***"I suppose, we're getting better with our use of language now, I don't think that anything has fundamentally changed in how we do the job"*** (24MVC).

While the lack of clarity in purpose was an issue for many, there was some consensus about the distinctiveness and defining features of youth work. The following section outlines what the research participants viewed as distinct, and presents some of the features which they deemed core.

Distinctiveness of Youth Work

The respondents were questioned about their views and perspectives of the defining characteristics and distinctiveness of youth work. These features were readily discussed and acted as a basis for talking about youth work's purpose. The defining features were broadly articulated and while there was no consensus, several prominent ideas emerged. The research participants contrasted youth work with other professional disciplines, and discussed some of the underlying principles including voluntary engagement and the centrality and paramountcy of the young person as defining characteristics.

The focus groups as with all other themes dealt with the subject in much less depth than the interviews. However, there are significant comments within the datum. Within the focus groups the distinctiveness of youth work was articulated

in terms of what it offers and how it compares with other professions. There was a differentiation made between youth work and social work, family life and formal education. While the focus groups recognised a differentiation, it was not always clear how the difference manifested itself. Nonetheless the sentiment is epitomised by a focus group member saying, ***"we create opportunities for young people to experience things that they won't experience in other areas"*** (focus group 2)***.*** Although the focus group suggested that youth work has the primacy of the young person as a distinctive characteristic, one person stated, ***"the core is about the young person as opposed to a curriculum"*** (focus group 2). This statement aligned the group member with the concerns of the young person rather than the desired outcomes of a curriculum.

All the respondents discussed principles, and these became a dominant focus regarding the distinctiveness of youth work. The focus groups identified several principles which they thought were defining or distinctive to youth work. These principles, while stated, were not well defined but gave a context for the datum collected in the interviews. The centrality of the young person in all that is done was a primary concern and principle for many in the focus groups. One respondent suggested the focus should be on the individual, stating ***"it's about that person, and I think that's what makes youth work so unique, it's able to impact each individual differently, I think for me that's the biggest difference particularly growing up as a young person"*** (focus group 2). Others referred to the uniqueness of the space and environment that is created for young people. One respondent stated, ***"whether that's an actual space or it's in a car journey or even in a game, or some activity, outdoor pursuits, it's actually headspace"*** (focus group 1). Throughout the focus groups the

emphasis on the environment was laden with principles. These principles emphasised the centrality of the young person and ideas that their participation is welcomed and valued. Comments about youth work practice, where the relationship is a primary focus and where the youth worker is an advocate, dominated the data collected in each of the focus groups.

Whilst not a primary focus of the interview schedule youth work's distinctive characteristics were a feature of 18 of the 24 responses. There was no significant bias shown in any of the variables (i.e. gender, sector, religious background). However, the greatest unity around any distinctive characteristic related to the voluntary principle with 9 respondents referring to it as necessary. While not all comments were so direct one respondent's comment epitomised much of the sentiment by simply stating ***"youth work is based on the principle of voluntary engagement"*** (1MSP). There were few counter arguments to this perspective but not all respondents mentioned it as a pivotal issue. However, it was noted that more men (N= 7) than women (N=2) mentioned the idea of voluntary engagement as a principle.

The respondents showed a diversity of opinion regarding the 'voluntary principle' in line with the focus groups. One respondent stated that ***"it is a partnership because it's not compulsory, it's not a school thing, they choose to opt into that next stage of youth work or that next stage of engagement or that next stage of relationships that they're actually committing themselves to be part of something that will actually challenge them or move them where they'll actually have to speak about things and learn about things that they agreed to be part of that process"*** (5MVC). The principle that young people choose to engage was the resounding emphasis in this youth worker's

perspective on the voluntary principle. Another respondent was emphatic in making it the differentiating factor between youth work and formal education. She said, ***"it's freedom, it's choice, for me it's what's some young people will never get in school because it's their choice to come here, because they want to, and they're learning here because they want to, we put on a hundred million programmes and it is choice if they want to do that, in school they have to do it"*** (4FSC).

Other defining features lay alongside the voluntary principle. A distinctiveness was articulated that youth work has the interests of the young person at the heart of practice. Similarly, two other interviewees stated that the emphasis on relationship was central. One stated ***"I'm saying that the relationship is primary and for me I think, and I've worked in a range of youth work settings with a range of young people with different needs, but I have always found the ability to work with them, young people, and it was because I had built a good relationship"*** (3FSC). A final distinctive characteristic which was mentioned on a number of occasions was the informal nature of youth work. An interviewee stated ***"I think that appeals to young people that we're not always stuck by.... you know, obviously there are boundaries but they're a bit broader than what they would be in a classroom"*** (respondent 19MVC). Implicit within all of these findings was the educational emphasis in youth work that became more evident when respondents talked about purpose.

Youth Work's Purpose Articulated

While the entire study relates to the purpose of youth work the focus groups and interviews attempted to ascertain what the respondents thought specifically

about this issue. The focus groups universally stated that the purpose of youth work was educational. This was manifest in many ways and with various emphases. It was stated that youth work is ***"not educational in the rigid way of exams or that, its experience, it's the personal learning"*** (Focus group 2) with many of the focus group respondents contrasting youth work to formal education. Their emphasis was on the informal nature of youth work with a focus on development, growth and change rather than the desired formal and predetermined outcomes of school. One respondent stated, ***"I do believe youth work is education, I think all youth work no matter what sector you put it into, I think it's all education…"*** and it is supporting young people in ***"…how you learn in life"*** (focus group 1). Conversely some of the respondents were more precise with one stating that the purpose of youth work was simply ***"personal and social development as defined in the curriculum"*** (Focus group 1) with another member agreeing. No one specifically suggested the nature of the education other than to say it was about change. However, one respondent stated that it was not necessarily about the young person achieving a predetermined outcome but to move them beyond point 'A'. Their perspective highlights the process of youth work over any specific or predetermined outcome ***"within a youth centre I would see the process much more important than the product and that for me is where I sort of gauge it and it's maybe, they mightn't have moved from A to B, but they've moved from A, they mightn't have got to B yet so it's about either movement or development from the young person"*** (focus group 1).

Furthermore, this focus group member posed a rhetorical question as to whether point B is known by youth workers at all. Implicit in the question is an assumption

regarding the starting point for the educational process for youth work; that is, the learning outcomes are determined by or with the young person. The notion that youth work is a process was manifest throughout both the focus groups and interviews, with varying levels of sophistication. A related discussion on outcomes permeated the focus groups and interviews. The focus group members were cynical about the pressure from managers to produce outcomes but at the same time saw a need for some emphasis on the product. This is evident in one respondent's perspective who thought that the credibility of youth work was measured by his rhetorical question ***"where are the outcomes?"*** (focus group 1). The implications were clear for him; if outcomes are not being worked upon, then the quality of the youth work may suffer as there is a need for some objective measurement. He thought youth work should provide this, but also recognised that the current emphasis may be stressing outcomes too much.

The parlance in the interviews regarding the definition and purpose of youth work was defined and articulated more fully than in the focus groups. Of the respondents, 22 of the 24 made a definite attempt to discuss the purpose of youth work. While not all comments were substantial, several interviewees made substantive points relating to a range of themes. The initial comments included stock phrases used across the youth sector parlance and particularly related to the Northern Ireland youth work curriculum (Department of Education 2003). The refrain ***"personal and social development"*** was used by 16 of the 24 respondents with 8 of these interviewees elaborating beyond the phrase. Other dominant phraseology related to youth work was **"informal and educational"** with 11 of the respondents using this terminology.

One person elaborated by stating that personal and social development is about ***"enhancing aspirations, you know, tolerance and understanding and respect for other people and that approach should be embedded in every piece of work that we do with young people"*** (14MVP). While not disentangled, the sentiment of preparing young people for life was a recurring theme. Another respondent defined personal and social development as ***"basically encouraging young people to express themselves but also challenging them in a way that allows them to be OK in the world"*** (24MVC). Prevalent in much of the discussion on purpose was this implicit focus on preparation for real life experience with 7 of the respondents seeing youth work as helping young people find their place in society. This was summed up by an interviewee who said, ***"youth work is more about day to day things and what they need in life"*** (18FSP).

Several interviewees (N=8) thought the role of the youth worker was central to the purpose of youth work. One respondent presented a broader view of this role placing the youth worker as a facilitator of change on both micro (individual) and macro (societal) levels. She said the role of the youth worker is ***"to work with young people to identify injustices of their own experiences and their own stories but also within their community and wider society and globally"*** (7FSC). Others emphasised the holistic nature of the role in supporting young people in all aspects of life. Two of the interviewees expressed an all-encompassing role of the youth worker. They thought the youth worker is there to support young people with which ever issue is prevalent. One respondent said, ***"whether they're*** (young people) ***overweight or whether they have social skills whether they want to become a rocket scientist… whether it's***

their family their school life, whether it's their faith and their spirituality, where are they going with all those sorts of different things so that's why I'm saying it's holistic it's about all the different aspects and how they all interlink" (11FVP). Another went further in emphasising the type of relationship that should be achieved with the young person saying he ***"would describe it almost like treating these young people as you'd treat your own children, but with those safety boundaries in place"*** (16MVC).

At the core of 12 of the interview responses was an overriding emphasis on youth work being an educational and transformational process. This was emphasised by twice as many men (N=8) as women (N=4) and a disproportionately higher number of voluntary sector respondents than others. While qualitative, these numbers are worthy of further investigation elsewhere.

Those interviewees having a focus on the educational and transformative purpose of youth work were not all in agreement nor were they always able to 'clearly' define the concepts. Again, the holistic nature of this education was emphasised. As one respondent put it ***"The purpose of youth work is… it definitely is educating young people, educating them in such a way that their quality of life is different, it improves, that their skill set, whether that be GCSE whether that be confidence, self-worth, esteem, that all needs to improve, but to me the point of view of the work is to journey with young people, to develop them holistically, to create an environment where they're growing personally and socially"*** (19MVC). Furthermore, as stated in the focus groups, the education being emphasised was more focused on a journey than a predetermined outcome or output. This type of education ***"is not about moving a young person from point A to point B or point C it's about***

moving the young person somewhere beyond point A and I think that's respectful of the young person, it's about helping them develop at their pace where they want to go" (6MSC). More specifically the education which most respondents talked of was that of a transformational nature. Implicitly and explicitly the respondents were interested in change that is mostly of an individual nature, but two interviewees focussed on societal change. One statement epitomises a particular kind of educational process; ***"It's about transforming young people's lives, and ultimately empowering them to transform the communities in which they live, and society in general"*** (2MVC).

Ascertaining the purpose of youth work is the focus of this theme and presents a diversity of findings. These findings will be analysed and discussed in chapter ten to determine how the purpose of youth work is perceived and defined. Crucially this will be contrasted with the literature to discover the level of alignment between the two perspectives.

Theme Two: It's all about Relationships?

Evidenced throughout the data is a basic or fundamental emphasis on the relationship with the young person. In talking about the purpose of youth work one focus group member stated, ***"I think fundamentally it's about relationships and if there's no relationship there you won't have that basis to challenge young people or help them progress through from A to wherever, I think relationships are the key"*** (Focus Group 1). Similarly, an interviewee placed an even stronger emphasis on the youth work relationship leading to 'education'. He stated, ***"it's like any educational process, if there's mutual respect between 2 people, they're going to get more out of it, so there's that fundamental, if you can't build a relationship with somebody where they have respect for you and you have respect for them, the chances of that transformative learning happening is next to nil"*** (2MVC). This language relating to the youth worker's relationship with the young person permeated the parlance throughout the interviews.

The two previous comments epitomised many of the respondents' attitude with a stated focus of the primacy of the relationship building as a youth work process. The statement above from a focus group; ***"I think fundamentally it's about relationships",*** was used as a characterising term for youth work. Across the data high importance was placed on relationships by all the respondents. The extent to which it was emphasised varied in both sets of focus groups and interview data but showed that it is a theme worthy of attention. While the focus groups referred to relationship building from the outset, due to time constraints, it was not given the same attention as within the interviews. Nonetheless, there were key statements and insights given in the two focus groups that add to the discussion.

The Importance of Relationship Building and its Purpose

Although the focus groups had limited discussion about the purpose of the relationship building process one respondent said it was ***"to help them*** (young people) ***make positive choices rather than negative choices"*** (Focus group 1) This purpose represents a notion presented across the two focus groups. In discussing the youth worker's relationship with young people there was broad agreement within the focus group that it should be a primary focus. Moreover, there was recognition that the emphasis on relationship building, while fundamental, was an extravagance which other professions were unable to possess. One respondent stated that "***youth workers have the luxury of being able to focus on relationships and not have to worry too much about other pressures that get brought into say the school environment or whatever"*** (Focus group 1).

The interviewees were significantly more engaged and animated about the relationship building process. Although youth work is sometimes caricatured by the relationship building process none of the 24 respondents suggested that this was the purpose of youth work in and of itself. However, many (N=9) stated that it was foundational or fundamental to youth work. Respondent 2MVC simply summed it up, ***"for me the fundamental, the starting point is the relationship between two human beings"***. One person emphatically said that relationship building is "***probably one of the most powerful things we use... and the stronger the relationship you have with a young person the more impact"*** (19MVC). Another placed a similar emphasis, stating the ***"relationship is the foundation, and therein lies the trust, the confidence in the youth worker, from the young person, to be able to explore, to open up those aspects, because there's massive trust issues with it in terms of the young person***

starting to feel vulnerable, starting to feel exposed, so the relationship is the crux of it, it's the foundation" (22MSP). While there is no doubting the importance of the relationship building process, differing perspectives on its purpose were expressed between the interviewees.

The findings show that the purpose of relationship building is broadly expressed through three emphases. Each emphasis showed the bias of the interviewee towards relationship building as a tool for education and change, as it helps to develop communication, or it creates positive experience of relationship. Regardless of which perspective was taken, the emphasis related to the development of the young person's learning. One respondent connected it with the development of skills and suggested relationship building ***"helps towards building all those other skills, communication, listening, judging, challenging, conflict even, how to manage conflict"*** (19MVC). One person succinctly stated that relationship building is ***"to create the space for change"*** (7FSC). The essence of the views expressed show an understanding of relationship building and its instrumental nature in bringing about learning of some type. One interviewee made a causal link between the quality of the relationship and the impact of the youth work. She said, ***"if you have a good relationship with young people then it has an impact on everything else, it impacts on the process, it impacts on the outcomes of the young people and just in their general well-being and their development as people"*** (10FSP). All the respondents spoke of a relationship building process that was purposeful but placed greater emphasis on its nature and quality.

The Nature and Quality of the Relationship Building Process

The nature and quality of the relationship was the primary emphasis within the focus groups with participants articulating the underlying principles and conditions for such a relationship building process. A discussion ensued in both focus groups regarding principles that should be evident in the relationship. There was gravitation towards the term ***"respectful relationships…"*** affirming it as a distinctive quality of youth work. As one respondent stated ***"… you know that's sometimes the difference between teachers, not always, but teachers and social workers, you start off getting to know the young person, and it's more of an equal relationship as well"*** (Focus Group 1).

Another respondent suggested that the relationship enhances the ability to challenge young people. He said, ***"you can work with young people and know them, and they can know you but there's no relationship there, there's no environment, there's no safety to challenge, but it's about building and creating a positive relationship that you can challenge"*** (Focus Group 1). This suggests that having a positive relationship creates greater depth to the youth work and serves the purpose more directly therefore enabling the potential to challenge and be challenged.

Of the interviewees, 21 spoke of the quality of the relationship highlighting its distinctive nature. One interviewee added depth saying, ***"the relationship that they build is quite a unique relationship in terms of the relationship between adults and young people you know, we work outside the family we work outside the school, it's not as formalised as school and as I said earlier it's about the equal relationship"*** (3FSC). Interviewees talked of a relationship that fostered trust, was built upon mutual respect with one stating ***"I***

think the relationship is deep, meaningful, trustworthy" and he continued ***"it's about not walking away – even when they have made huge mistakes in their lives, even when they've done the maddest of mad things"*** (16MVC).

The type of relationship outlined above was emphasised in majority of the interviews (N=17). Furthermore, without an explicit question, half of the interviewees referred to the core conditions of Carl Rogers' (1967) person centred approach as a basis for the relationship building process. While these three core conditions of unconditional positive regard, congruence and empathy were mentioned, only one person made a fleeting, yet explicit, reference to Rogers in the interviews. Nonetheless, unconditional positive regard was alluded to most frequently with empathy cited next and congruence (or aligned notions) stated least.

The emphasis on unconditional positive regard showed a clear emphasis towards respect and acceptance of young people. Two respondents epitomised this sentiment with one stating ***"you have to have a non-judgemental approach and young people have the freedom to say something and for me to be skilled enough to be able to listen and actually just hear them… that's a core element of a relationship"*** (19MVC). The other respondent operationalised the conditions further by saying ***"young people know that they're valued, and somebody actually cares enough to have conversations, to ask questions, to engage with them, that they're getting that sense when they come in the door, this is a good place to be, this is a safe environment, with safe appropriate adults, these adults care about me"*** (9FVC).

Dilemmas and Threats to the Paramountcy of Relationship

Within youth work the gravitation towards relationships is not without internal and external threats or dilemmas. A focus group member suggested that this emphasis on relationships was under threat with only 2 of the 5 priorities in the latest government policy focus on young people. He said, "***so policy for me does put pressure on that relationship and that ability to develop over time, realistic amounts of time, the types of relationship and quality of relationship that you want"*** (Focus Group 1). Furthermore, the second focus group questioned whether youth work gets stuck in the relationship. One respondent stated, ***"I think sometimes we get stuck in the relationship building stage – I think that particularly when you're working with small groups of young people on a 1-1 basis – I think often we don't move beyond that – I think we need to be more pro-active about what outcomes do we want"*** (Focus group 2).

The power dimension to relationship building also surfaced as a dilemma within the focus groups. While there was substantial consensus that youth workers try to create an equal relationship endeavouring to reduce any power imbalance, this is not always the case. One respondent thought ***"we would be fooling ourselves to think that we weren't in a position of power with young people we absolutely are, but for me it's about using that opportunity that creates equality"*** (Focus group 2).

While the interviewees did not discuss the dilemmas of relationship building in great depth, caution was expressed. This emanated from the boundaries inherent within the relationship building process. Two people suggested that a clear boundary should be made within the relationship so mixed messages were

not transmitted. Another cautioned about the friendliness of the youth worker, ***"everybody has a definition of building relationships and I've seen so many incongruent relationships, where the worker has tried to be the best friend of the young person and that's their definition of what youth work is about and it most certainly for me is not"*** (15FVC). Another concern related to youth workers thinking that youth work is only about relationships. This was the focus for one respondent who commented ***"I think that is the one thing*** (relationship building) ***that a lot of youth workers latch on to – and sometimes that's all they latch on to"*** (8MVP). This criticism was targeted at those who see youth work as being primarily about building relationships with young people.

Finally, and linked to the previous comment, there was a concern that youth workers are not always there for the young person but rather their work is out of self-interest. One comment illustrates a dominant perspective across the interviews ***"we're not there for our needs in terms of the young people having this great relationship with us, yes we can work when we have a solid relationship founded but it's about more than relationship, it's about outcomes for young people and it's about progression for young people"*** (3FSC). This gravitation away from relationship building being the purpose of youth work is recognition that this stance is more about the worker and less about the young person. One interviewee summed it up with a differing emphasis ***"how can you build relationship up without having a conversation with young people, without spending time with them without understanding them, so to me that's probably one of the biggest processes***

in youth work is actually engaging in conversation, trusting in conversation, and understanding the process" (19MVC).

This statement about conversation seems to be presented as a more fundamental process than that of relationship building. The significance will be contrasted within the analysis and discussion chapter of the thesis. However, the findings regarding conversation will be presented in the next section of this chapter.

Theme Three: Conversation and Dialogue – Key Tools for Youth Work?

Both the focus groups and interviews emphasised the process and practice of conversation. While the focus groups made a passing reference to the theme, the interviews showed a greater depth and insight to the terminology. Respondents shared a range of ideas and perspectives regarding the theme, broadly viewing conversation and dialogue as key tools in the purpose of youth work.

Meaningful Engagement through Conversation and Dialogue

Although all respondents were uncertain about the significance and purpose of conversation and dialogue in their practice, there was an evident commitment to the process. One focus group participant talked of this commitment and its connection to action, saying ***"I love doing work with conversation because particularly work with young men it's about conversation and talking about what to do"*** (Focus group 1). He later went on to say why "***It's having them meaningful conversations, conversations that they know; this is really going to benefit them and help them to communicate"*** (Focus group 1). While he identified developing communication skills as a purpose of conversation, others did not view communication in such technical terms. Having conversation as the basis of everything was a more fundamental idea expressed by two other focus group members, ***"I think that to do dialogue for me is such a key component, it's the cog for turning everything else"*** (Focus group 2) and another ***stated "for me dialogue is the starting point of self-reflection, it's about this ability to hold a mirror up in front of your face or somebody else's face, for me it is the key for understanding self"*** (Focus

group 2). Here, conversation and dialogue were either seen as central or foundational to youth work.

A dominant thought in the focus groups was the connection between conversation and relationships. One respondent suggested that conversation is about relationship, stating, ***"it's an intricate thing, even if the young person is not saying very much there's usually dialogue, and I think that's where it happens, that's where the development happens"*** (Focus group 1). Another respondent suggested that a stronger relationship would enhance the level of dialogue. While the focus groups were not always clear about the significance of conversation there was enough emphasis to pursue the theme in the interview process.

Within the interviews the connection to relationship building was the most dominant theme relating to the purpose of conversation and dialogue, with 10 of the 24 interviewees making this connection. Several respondents emphasised that conversation was the vehicle to build the relationship. The contrasting and sometimes contradictory view related to the reverse; conversation was the purpose for building a relationship with a young person. These two contrasting views are exemplified in the following statements. One person stated, ***"conversation is more the purpose of youth work… the conversation is the reason why we're establishing that relationship"*** (22MSP) while another argued ***"it's a vital cog in building relationships"*** (5MVC).

Despite this, throughout the interviews there was much consensus about the purpose of conversation and dialogue. While relationship building was viewed somewhat differently, there was broad agreement that conversation was a

process which helped to bring about learning and, ultimately, change within young people. One person simply said, ***"I think conversation's important because young people are able to learn about themselves"*** (20FVP). Others developed a more complex analysis of conversation and dialogue. One respondent suggested they use ***"conversation to pull out what they're*** (the young person) ***saying or challenge what they' saying or encourage them to do something better"*** (11FVP). Another stated ***"conversation probably is going in, looking at things deeper than the initial words that are said at the start and also getting them to think and develop things for themselves into something a bit bigger"*** (8MVP). The emphasis on learning through conversation was evident in 12 of the interviews. One person cemented this view by saying ***"I believe it's through conversation that young people change, that young people reflect, and that young people grow"*** (22MSP).

Furthermore, while the concept of conscientization was explicit in only some of the interviews (N=3) it was inferred in other exchanges. One explained the concept as ***"you are supporting young people to develop their critical thinking skills. You don't really know where that will end up, you're not really in control of that process and you're not necessarily seeking to turn out young people who are all 'A's"*** (2MVC). Helping young people to think critically about themselves and their world was viewed as a central component of conversations with young people.

Conversation - Creating Equality in the Relationship

While the focus groups stated very little about the equality created through conversation, the interviews raised many more issues. However, one focus group comment was intriguing when it differentiated between the relationship

with his children and the young people with whom he worked. He stated that the conversations that took place were ***"hopefully without power or a desire to control, I mean if I'm having a conversation with my daughter that's a different conversation than a real youth worker would have with my daughter because I still have the father daughter relationship, in school it's a different relationship because they have to churn out 5 GCSEs A-C level, so youth work, hopefully the conversations happen on a more..."*** another respondent interjected ***"equal basis"*** (focus group 1).

The interviewees talked more about the potential of conversation in reducing the power imbalance between the youth worker and the young person. Conversation was deemed to be a two-way process which immediately makes it a different educational or learning tool to other didactic methods of communication; 5 of the 24 interviewees stated that that conversation was a two-way process. One expressed the view that ***"It is definitely two-way conversation, young people have complete ownership"*** (19MVC), with another commented that ***"it's listening, it's actually hearing what they're saying and not just nodding your head in the right places"*** (18FSP)

The power dynamics which conversation and dialogue seek to address were mentioned by 22 of the interviewees. While not all of the respondents made similar comments, there was a strong message coming through in the interviews. One respondent stated that the relationship that conversation creates meant that they were ***"involved in a reciprocal process of mutual learning and mutual respect"*** (2MVC). Another stated that youth work is based upon equality ***"it's based on an equal relationship between the young people and the adults"*** (5MVC). Furthermore, there was an assertion that it cannot be dialogue unless

the power is shared. As one respondent stated, ***"I think it isn't dialogue or conversation if there isn't a balance or a flip of power, if the power structure isn't right in that situation, then you're not in dialogue"*** (7FSC).

Implicit within all the interviews was an embracing of a participative working alliance with young people. This perspective placed emphasis on young people leading the conversation and young people driving the agenda. Ultimately, conversation is a participatory process. One interviewee said that conversation helped ***"to put a young person at ease to make them feel welcome and valued, especially if you're going to encourage them down the line with the participation stuff and becoming more involved"*** (9FVC). There were implicit connections made between participation and conversation although the interviewees stated only a few direct references. As the findings are presented the correlation will be further examined and explicated.

Theme Four: Participation - Ownership or Tokenism

The focus groups discussed participation in a way which led to deeper questioning in the interviews. Across the two sets of data collection methods most respondents had discussed the place and value of participation in youth work. While there was commitment to the process of participation there was much differentiation between the individual respondents. Regarding word frequency, the term participation was used more in the second of the two focus groups and much more frequently in the interviews. The following findings represent a diversity of perspectives and show that this process, while having most coverage in policy terms, is not fully embraced.

Participation and Purpose

Within the focus groups little was said about participation. However, it was identified by one of the two focus groups as a key process. One participant stated, ***"participation is a process, but I think to describe that process as levels of engagement is perhaps a more effective way rather than using the word participation only because there's an assumption that you participate, or you don't whereas engagement to me is a process, it's about process"*** (focus group 2). In the focus groups it was difficult to determine what was meant by participation or its purpose. "Taking part", "working with" and "giving choice" were terms used in both focus groups to describe participative activity. Beyond these terms there was little evidence of understanding a broader definition. However, there was one focus group member who volunteered a perspective on the purpose of this process ***"I think participation has to have 'knock on' effect on the individual, their lives and the choice and roads that they take"*** (focus group 2). In the focus groups the discussion about participation was nuanced with little clarity about its place or function in youth

work. Participation raised questions rather than being seen as a clearly identifiable process.

Conversely, all interviewees had a perspective on the definition and purpose of participation and there was much greater diversity of opinion compared to the focus groups. The respondents' perspectives ranged from clear commitment of the process to a cynical view that young people were merely manipulated or tokenised. Nonetheless, definitions and models of participation surfaced. One such definition suggested ***"the pure fact that a young person of whatever age decides to turn up and do something with a youth worker – that's participation"*** (1MSP).

Another view represented in the interviews was the notion of ownership. One interviewee stated, ***"I think full participation comes when young people have ownership or even part ownership of it, because we're working together, youth worker and young person"*** (19MVC). Another said, ***"if they feel they have that ownership of the group, then they're far more likely to take part in it"*** (8MVP). While the word 'ownership' was not always used (N=11), this emphasis emanated from many of the discussions on participation. Euphemisms such as taking control, exercising rights or empowerment were used by a number of the interviewees (N=6). One person suggested that participation puts the young person ***"in a position where they have power and control over the direction that they're travelling in or they want their lives to go"*** (10FSP). This parlance illustrates a perspective which not only implies that young people should be engaged but also that they are leading and directing the youth work.

Another related emphasis in defining participation was to give young people a voice. The underlying assumption relates to young people being voiceless and that participation is an attempt to hear them. One respondent suggested ***"it's about getting their voices heard as young people"*** (20FVP) while another said, ***"it's young people having a say in issues that impact on them, you know whether it be in their youth group, in their youth club, in their community"*** (17FSC).

Creating ownership and giving voice to young people were strongly emphasised ideas in the interview process, but other concepts were also prevalent including the notions of participation being political in a macro sense or personal in a micro sense. However, most of the interviewees aligned themselves to the latter. One person alluded to the macro scale of participation saying for some ***"young people their focus will be on votes at 16, and personal changes are the by-products"*** (7FSC). Another stated that young people should be engaged now rather than being prepared for some sort of future involvement in society. She said, ***"seeing young people as citizens in the here and now, that whole thing in the model for effective practice of preparing young people for participation, the word preparing really annoys me, so I'm kind of going, young people can participate now"*** (21FVP). Although the more macro benefits of participation are evident, gravitation towards the personal outcomes was a clear bias within the sample. Examples of this bias toward the individual were prevalent throughout the interviews with one respondent stating that participation was ***"definitely a process of learning. Whatever that learning might be depends on the individual"*** (9FVC).

In particular, a large number (N=10) of the sample saw personal learning to be a benefit of the participatory process. The assumption here is, if young people are in charge of an event they not only take ownership, they also learn. One interviewee gave an example of an organised trip stating that the young people may want to go to Costa Brava with a £4000 budget yet through a participatory process of negotiation arrive at something different. He said ***"you work through the session and eventually you get down to – we're going to do Krakow, we're going to do Auschwitz, we're tying it into the GCSE, you can tie it in with your own personal development and your own personal targets, and see whenever you do empower them whenever you do give them the responsibilities and..... pure participation"*** (16MVC). The process described is thought to be participative, but he steers the young people away from their choice towards a more prescribed educational agenda. While not all described participation in these terms the theme of learning was most prominent. Others talked of the shared learning process arrived at through participation and how people learn together by taking part in activities. None of the interviewees explicitly spoke of direct political action or civic engagement through participation but two respondents loosely alluded to it.

The parlance which was used to describe models of participation involved words such as partnership, process, journey or the inherent values involved. One respondent proposed it was more of a circle. She suggested ***"it's a circle that young people can come in at different times and different place to be involved in things and...*** (pause) ***and again it's back to the skill of the youth worker to notice, you know where young people want to get engaged a wee bit further or want to develop a wee bit more"*** (15FVC). One respondent used

language akin to that of Annie Wierenga's (2001) model recognising that participation only works when the participation is real and non-tokenistic for young people. She contested a simplistic view of participation stating, "***so it's not about the forums - and I'm not dissing those things"*** (7FSC). She went on to suggest that if practice around participation is marked by the three components of Wierenga (2001) model, ***"meaning, control and connectedness"*** (7FSC) then it will be more effective and significant.

Difficulties and Dilemmas Relating to Participation

Both the focus groups and interviews illustrated that the process of participation is not without difficulties. The focus group respondents gravitated towards discussing the dilemmas inherent in the process. While there was an evident commitment to participation there were some reflective criticisms of the process. One respondent suggested that the word participation and the aligned term empowerment ***"wrangled"*** with him, adding ***"it says a lot but nothing"*** (focus group 1). Another respondent implied that participation should have the young person at the centre and actively choosing what they want but perceived some youth workers not holding the same perspective. She stated that ***"participation is a choice, and I question… how many youth workers really make it about the young person"*** (focus group 2). Conversely, other focus group members thought the process of participation as something organic and not prescribed. This is evident in the following statement ***"there's something to be said about the skill of just that organic-ness of the young people directing where it goes, but unstructured facilitation, I don't even know if it's a term but .....It is now, but unstructured facilitation"*** (focus group 1). While participation is viewed to be young person led he suggests there is still a need for a facilitator. This juxtaposition was pursued in the interviews to gain more clarity.

There was a strong emphasis on participation throughout the interviews, but the process was not without criticism. The most significant criticism related to the tokenistic (N=8) nature of what is called participation. One respondent laughed when he was asked about participation. He said, ***"it is tokenism… my problem with participation is too often, it is a funder or a manager saying, oh, you've got to have a steering group of young people; oh you've got to have a youth parliament in the city council or we need to have a place for two young people on our committee"*** (1MSP). Another stated that participation within ***"the current youth work framework is around young people doing things and taking part, it has become as shallow as that… and it has become so tokenistic"*** (2MVC). The reactivity to tokenistic participation dominated the critical discourse but there were few pragmatic alternatives suggested.

One interviewee suggested that the youth worker's role is to work in partnership with the young person by making them aware of the realities. His response to the young people was to say, ***"yeah I hear what you're saying and that would be ideal to have that but, to be honest with you, we don't have a budget for that"*** (24MVC) and then he negotiated an alternative. Yet another respondent emphasised the partnership as fundamental. He said, ***"if it's going to be a partnership and a sharing and a process then it has to have that foundation in that initial relationship"*** (5MVC).

Finally, the youth workers interviewed showed a clear commitment to the process of participation, whatever they thought of its outworking, but policy and predetermined, desired outcomes for young people were perceived as a threat to the process. One respondent talked of this threat to participation saying, ***"it is***

becoming increasingly difficult though, more difficult I feel because of expectations from Priorities for youth and the Education Authority" (9FVC). She felt that the movement towards more targeted pre-determined goals meant that youth work could be less genuinely participative.

Theme Five: Learning through Experiences

All but one of the respondents named experiential learning as a core process in their understanding of youth work practice but each respondent presented differing emphases. The focus groups placed less importance on experiential learning while some of the interviewees saw it as a central theme. This section will show how respondents viewed the experiences which they created and how they perceived the learning process for young people within their practice.

Purposeful Experiences for Learning

While there was agreement that experiential learning was a focal process of youth work, respondents were not always clear about its purpose. There was some indication that within the focus groups there was not always an agreed understanding underlying the process of experiential learning. One respondent thought a ***"common part of our*** (youth workers) ***role is to facilitate different processes where they*** (young people) ***can learn different things that are going to be beneficial to them in their development"*** (focus group 1). This respondent replaced the word experience for processes, adding some confusion to the discussion but also showing an ambiguity of the term. Another issue related to the rationale for using experiential learning in youth work. One respondent suggested it was about their learning preference. He said, ***"I think for me and my work, that's*** (experiential learning) ***an essential element of our work, but again I think it's individualistic, because I think we do learn more……I'll say me – I learn more about doing through experience"*** (focus group 2). This focus group member places experiential learning at the centre of their practice but suggests it relates to their personal bias and without a clear rationale.

Within the focus groups the experiential learning discussion emphasised the activities which youth workers create. One member said, ***"there's something about giving them experiences such as residentials, and programmes, and just allowing them the space to be young people"*** (focus group 2). Furthermore, it was emphasised that the experiences which youth workers create, whether the focus is on gender, community relations or international work should be real. Another group member agreed and summed it up as being ***"exposure for young people, exposure to concepts and ideas that will affect who they become"*** (focus group 1). However, experience was not deemed enough, as reflection was referred to as a key component of the learning experience. The conceptualisation of experiential learning outlined within the focus groups was not comprehensive but formed a basis for exploring the theme within the interviews in greater depth.

The interviewees discussed the notion of 'learning through experience' and 'experiential learning' with more rigour and ease than those in the focus groups. All 24 respondents had something significant to say about how they understood or used experiential learning in their practice. Fifteen of the interviewees articulated a definition and understanding of the process while others were less able to develop a thoughtful response. This was disproportionately discussed more frequently by men and voluntary sector participants. While the quantitative frequency of the data is only of minor concern in this qualitative study there may be some significance for future research. Nonetheless the interviewees showed awareness of the process and all, apart from 1, suggested it was a significant aspect of their youth work practice.

While 15 of the interview respondents stated a rationale or definition for experiential learning there was a diversity of perspective and emphasis in utilising such a process. Fundamentally it is viewed as an educational process within youth work. One respondent stated, ***"I think the vast majority of education is learning through experience"*** (12MVP). Furthermore 7 interviewees emphasised the change, growth and developmental aspects of this experiential learning process. One respondent suggested that experiential learning should be challenging and something to which young people have agreed. He added ***"it's actually about creating opportunities where young people can have an experience that can promote change"*** (1MSP). Another respondent also talked of the challenge that experiential learning offers. He said, ***"you can see movement in the young person in terms of conquering fears, challenging themselves and overcoming barriers to things, and you can actually see movement within that and development within that in terms of trying new things and skills"*** (5MVC). These learning outcomes are not pre-determined but rather negotiated as implied by respondent 1MSP.

Others talked about the difference that experiential learning makes for the young person in contrast to other types of education. One person said, ***"every time you're teaching something you're denying them the experience of learning it themselves"*** (12MVP). Another commented ***"it's about being able to explore that with kids when something happens whenever some successes come about and whenever some failures come about, and being able to sit down and say, well, what did you learn from that?"*** (8MVP). This informal approach to learning emphasises the climate and environment which the youth worker is trying to create.

While the environment was deemed central to the learning experiences 15 of the interviewees specifically mentioned the importance of the young person's safety. One said, ***"it is about giving young people a chance to test things out in a comfortable way, in a secure way that's not threatening to them and then they can try something out"*** (6MSC). Another interviewee talked about the preconditions that should be in place to create a learning space emphatically stating that ***"young people have got to feel safe"*** (12MVP). Although there is a desire that the learning experiences created for the young people are challenging and testing, safety is still deemed paramount.

Whilst a number of the respondents (N=9) discussed the significance of experiential learning in their youth work practice not all made reference to the key components of reflection and action. Learning by doing or in action was a dominant theme within the interviewees' understanding. One respondent talked about their understanding of experiential learning within her youth work organisation. She was adamant that the experience had to be 'real' saying ***"it's not playing at youth work and it's not let's build a pretend project about a pretend kind of issue"*** she added, it's ***"what is happening now, why is it like this, what can we do about it, supporting young people to take some of that stuff on and do it and the learning would just happen kind of naturally. All of a sudden you would have this flourishing of skills with a young person and it was by doing the real stuff"*** (21FVP). Another similarly emphasised the doing aspect of learning through experience. He stated that in contrast to formal education, young people ***"learn through doing or they learn through taking part or they learn through others or they learn through***

other people's experiences or stories or they learn through adults talking them through things which is entirely different process for me" (5MVC).

Along with the notion of doing or learning through the experience was the complementary thought of review and reflection. These concepts were viewed as necessary for many purporting the process of experiential learning. One person simply stated, ***"you definitely do learn through experience, and it is the whole process of going through the process from beginning to end, but it's also important to review that process"*** (17FSC). Another added depth in saying ***"experiential learning is a process in its own right, but it can only be fully understood if you're prepared to critically analyse and reflect on it"*** (14MVP). Perhaps, the most salient contribution was from a female interviewee who said, ***"experiential learning does bring young people outside of their own world"*** she added it's ***"that gradual process of seeing and hearing things from another perspective but the learning is in how it's unpacked for the young people, some young people can do that quite well themselves"*** (15FVC).

Examples of Practice

Throughout the interviews there was much discussion about the experiences and activities which were created with young people. There were 20 of the 24 respondents who could articulate significant experiences from their practice. The discussion of these experiences varied considerably. Some of the respondents were drawn to talk of very specific types of activities while others spoke of how they engaged in a range of processes to work with young people. The more specific accounts of experiences involved youth forums; outdoor education; residential opportunities; community relations; recreational activities;

volunteering and group work dealing with specific themes like health and wellbeing, Aspergers, ADHD, refugees and foreign nationals. Conversely many (N=9) talked of the processes of relationship building, conversation and participation as the basis for all the experiences from which young people could learn.

An expression of this is manifest in the statement ***"it's the relationship, it's the educational process, it's all those, the conversation through learning, the how do you learn through doing the activity which then relates back to an aspect of your life"*** (respondent 2MVC). Another respondent suggested that the experience created something with depth. She said, ***"I think the accelerated learning processes happen whenever there's an intensity in the purpose, the relationship, the communication, the interaction"*** (15FVC). One interviewee summed up the youth work process by saying ***"everything I do with them is a learning curve for them or an experience or I try to make it that; even just sitting having conversation"*** (18FSP). Finally, one respondent highlighted the participative nature of the learning experience within youth work. She simply said, of experiential learning, ***"I see it very much as part of that participation process"*** (21FSP). The interviews show that the process of experiential learning is intertwined with the other processes previously outlined but is also distinctive.

In presenting the final theme of Theories, Philosophies and Models informing practice, it should become evident that a spectrum of views prevail which add to current youth work thinking and parlance.

Theme Six: Theories, Philosophies and Models Informing Practice

At the basis of all the processes and thinking outlined in this study the researcher assumed that theories and models informed practice. While all participants were questioned about theory and models, not all were forthcoming with coherent or conscious ideas about what informed their practice. Nonetheless, the language used, and concepts discussed implicitly suggested concepts and theoretical models. Therefore, these perspectives will be presented within this section. As in the previous findings outlined, there was more substantial evidence presented in the interviews than the focus groups. However, the insights gained from the focus groups were useful and informed the interview schedule.

Politics Informing Youth Work Practice

Explicit references to theory were infrequent but there were indications of what informed the youth workers' practice. Although political ideas and aspirations were only expressed by a few of the participants, they are worthy of mention. Some of the youth workers in the focus groups alluded to a political model or dimension to their work. This came to the fore on a few occasions. One respondent suggested that ***"everything that happens within youth work is political"*** (focus group 2) with another respondent suggesting that youth workers were the conduits to the political power. She stated, ***"we're also that bridge between young people and decision makers, Stormont, the local..."*** (focus group 1).

Similarly, some interviewees talked about the political drivers and principles which informed their practice. Although only two respondents talked explicitly of a political dimension to their work the interview data was not apolitical. This sentiment is encapsulated in the following statement ***"it's*** (youth work) ***almost a***

bit of a political act because the world says that young people don't matter, or that they shouldn't – you don't have to listen to them or they don't really count, so if you are working with young people in a way that they realise, actually my voice matters, I can articulate a message, I can put myself across, I have a place at the table… then I think you've done something that's quite subversive and it goes against the grain" (21FVP). The articulation of youth work outcomes in this response was evident across the interviews but without an explicit reference to politics. Another respondent was more explicit as he reflected on what had informed his practice. He said, ***"I had that sense of growing up of the importance of politics, the importance of understanding the world, fairness, redistributive notions around getting what you were entitled to, that nobody was better than you and you were no better that anybody, we felt we needed to share that out and their sense of having to claim their rights"*** (2MVC). He went on to suggest that these ideas were still his drivers for 'doing' youth work.

Theory Informing Practice

The importance of relationship building and conversation, a continuum of participation and ideas on experiential learning were presented throughout the focus groups. However, explicit references to theory were lighter than expected across this data collection phase. Whilst one focus group member stated, ***"we need to ensure there is a theory base to this and use different theories out there to help us in our practice"*** (focus group 2) there was little evidence of explicit theoretical models. No one mentioned the aligned theoretical perspectives of Carl Rogers, David Kolb, Paulo Freire or even Roger Hart within the focus groups. While this may be solely indicative of the focus group

respondents and the questions asked, it raised the need for more in-depth and prolonged inquiry with the interviewees.

The nature of interviews created opportunity for more comprehensive investigation of theory and the underpinning models informing practice. While this was the intention, the depth in the responses was limited. Only 7 interviewees referred to specific theoretical perspectives and did so with only a fleeting reference. Nonetheless, when asked about the youth work processes that had been discussed, more fluid analysis ensued. A significant number of respondents (N=19) could discuss or visualise frameworks for understanding youth work practice. It is salient that explicit theoretical perspectives were not prominent in the youth worker's phraseology, yet they were able to articulate a rationale for the emphasis of a particular process. It is therefore in these conversations when interviewees reflected on how they perceived the processes in their work that they volunteered critique, theory and even philosophical notions.

All interviewees were asked about the theories and models which inform their practice. While a number (N=5) gravitated towards a clear theoretical model, others said they either could not identify anything or their practice was simply guided by experience. Only two of the respondents stated overt cynicism about theory. One said, ***"theory and models are based on those who can't; watching those who can"*** (13MVC). This cynical view implies an irrelevance of theory in practice, yet the respondent had clear ideas about the perspectives which he held. While this attitude did not permeate the other interviews the lack of discussion on theory was noticeable.

While only 9 interviewees spoke about specific theoretical perspectives all engaged in discussion on the perspectives they held. In total 3 referred to Carl Rogers; 3 referred to the work of Paulo Freire; 2 embraced participative models (including those of Harry Shier and Roger Hart); 2 referred to David Kolb's experiential learning model and 2 referenced Larry Brendtro's circle of courage. Only a few of these were discussed in any detail but showed that, while not comprehensive, theoretical models do inform some practice. The other interviewees were able to converse about the practices in which they engage on a daily basis, and could articulate the purpose of their engagement with young people through such processes. However, a definitive and robust theoretical rationale for youth work practice was not forthcoming from any of the respondents.

Emerging Models Derived from the Processes

Throughout the data collection phase all respondents spoke of their understanding relating to the working processes and practices in which they engage. While a few respondents talked of engaging processes other than the four being explored in this thesis, there was a broad consensus. One interviewee, unprompted, stated the ***"key processes are around conversation, and activities that promote positive relationships, and learning through doing"*** (2MVC). This clarity was not shared by all the respondents but there was a clustering around relationship, conversation and participation with the process of experiential learning being less prominent.

After the focus group had concluded the participants were asked, independently, to prioritise the processes by writing their responses on simple pro-forma (appendix 8). The matrix below (Table 9.2) illustrates how they prioritised each of

the processes with varying emphases. Relationship building was perceived as the priority for half the focus group members and nearly all (N=7 of 8) the respondents prioritising it as number 1 or 2. Conversely 6 members of the focus groups prioritised experiential learning as the 4th choice of the processes.

N=8	**1st Priority**	**2nd Priority**	**3rd Priority**	**4th Priority**
Relationship Building	4	3	1	0
Conversation	2	5	1	0
Participation	0	1	4	1
Experiential learning	1		1	6
Choice instead of Participation *(added)*	1			
Engagement instead of Participation *(added)*		1		

Table 9.2 Focus groups priority of each process

While little is known of their rationale, this blunt reactive response adds to the thoughts and perspective of the interviewees. Conversely only 13 of the interviewees volunteered to rank or prioritise any of the processes, yet all who did so emphasised the range of processes. However, discussing the processes enabled respondents to identify where their bias lay and showed how they emphasised each process.

The following quantitative measurement merely acts as an indication and overview of how the interviewees saw each process. Of the 13 interviewees prioritising the processes, 8 thought that relationship building was the most important process. Three participants emphasised conversation and 2 could not prioritise but believed they were intertwined into one model or process. Views on participation and learning through experience or experiential learning were similarly split but prioritised less, with most respondents stating the importance of conversation and relationship building leading to these processes. One respondent simply stated ***"I think they're connected and I think it would be relationships in the middle for me and the other 3 coming in… I still do think that the relationship is core"*** (3FSC). Another respondent went further saying ***"you can't have conversation without the relationships; you can't have the participation without the relationships; you can't have the experiential learning without relationships"*** (20FVP). These responses are indicative of a general bias towards relationship building. However, none of the respondents stated that this was a purpose of youth work in itself but rather a process which enables other learning.

Those who placed conversation as greater priority saw it as a vehicle to create a stronger relationship with the young person. One interviewee said, ***"if you don't have conversation you don't have anywhere to go"*** (respondent 18FSP). The assumption being that conversation enables the other processes to flourish. While this may be the case, the relationship building process was broadly viewed as the initial phase in working with young people. One youth worker said, ***"it doesn't have to be a woolly relationship but as long as they're prepared to engage with you, so I think that has to be a priority every time"*** (8MVP).

However, it was perceived that dialogue and conversation developed greater depth and mutuality between the young person and the youth worker. Evidently a closer alliance was perceived between relationship building and conversation than the other two processes, and in a few cases (N=6) participation and learning through experience were deemed incidental.

A number (N=8) of the respondents suggested a visual representation or model for understanding the connection between the four processes. These representations varied from a glove to a hamburger. While illustrative, the imagery presented showed more subtle and esoteric perceptions. An exchange with one respondent illustrates the complexity and subtlety. The interviewee suggested ***"it's a weaved together set of parallel lines you know…Yeah and with the young person at the core"*** (16MVC). Another shared a similar image saying, ***"I suppose the only kind of picture that comes into my head is kind of like weaving or mesh"*** (21FVP). The hamburger illustration also showed a further level of complexity. ***"So, it can be seen as a burger, and in between the burger part is participation… the bap, you know, is the relationship… And then there's a wrapper over it, the conversation It's kind of like it's package because very often, if you come to me as the burger, the thing I'm going to be able to do most of all with you is the conversation… then once we get past the wrapper through the conversation then we can unravel the other stuff that's in there"*** (22MSP). While the imagery is difficult to fully understand the illustration has a unitary focus with youth work hinging on what can be done through conversation.

Others were more conventional in presenting theoretical models. Three respondents simply offered a Venn diagram (Fig 9.1) to illustrate their perception

of the inter-connectedness of the processes. This meant that relationship was perceived as the point where the three other processes interlock. The visual depiction of the processes illustrates the priorities of the workers and shows emerging models or typologies for understanding practice. Not all agreed on either the priorities of the processes or the visualisation, but there was common ground from which to build.

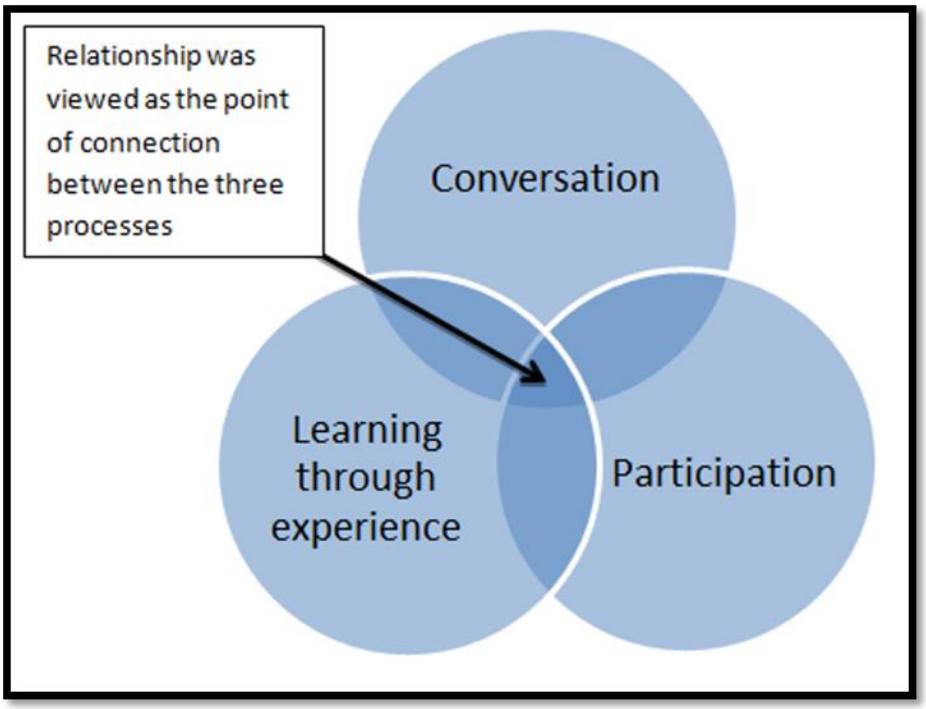

Fig 9.1 Relationship as the interconnecting point

While the models outlined above have little alignment to a specific model or frameworks from literature, the visual depiction and priority given to a process shows a theoretical perspective. In the analysis and discussion chapter these perspectives will be explored and dissected further.

Summary of Findings

The findings outlined demonstrate how the respondents articulated their understanding of the purpose of, and processes involved in, youth work. While the themes were somewhat prescribed due to the interview and focus group schedule they illustrate the priorities and emphases of 32 youth workers across

the sector. Throughout the chapter, perceptions and understanding relating to the purpose of youth work have been highlighted. These perceptions were further explored by investigation of the processes underpinning that purpose. The findings relating to these processes of relationship building, conversation and dialogue, participation, and learning through experience have been presented thematically. Finally, theoretical models and underpinning philosophies have been outlined to gain further insight to the perspectives held by the youth work practitioners. In the following chapter, analysis and discussion of these findings will be presented to show the connections between the data, policy context and the literature.

Chapter Ten: Analysis and Discussion

While no single hypothesis exists, there is an attempt throughout the study to investigate whether the written epistemology of youth work bears a relationship with the youth workers' understanding of its purpose. Although it is difficult to infer significance from such a small sample (32 in total) the findings show patterns and insights which delineate a depth of thinking that has been missing from the discourse of youth work. Presented in six themes, the findings illustrate varying perspectives of what youth workers thought about the purposes and processes of their profession. The analysis and discussion of these findings will show how their perceptions relate to the research question. Throughout this chapter there is definite and intentional reference made to the literature and the theoretical ideas which the findings illustrate. Making connections between the analysis of the data and the literature shows how the participants' perception aligned with theory and wider thinking. The discussion attempts to draw parallels, contrast and elucidate new insights.

Eliciting a comprehensive understanding of the purpose of youth work is the primary focus of the study. Therefore, the initial analysis involves dissecting the findings in relation to this focus and discussing the pertinent issues. The secondary aspect of the study involves an examination of the processes in which youth workers engage. The analysis of these findings will show the linkages between the youth workers' perceptions and the philosophical insights from literature which underpin these processes. Finally, analysis and discussion of the place of theory and the models underpinning the thinking will be presented, from which new models and typology then ensue.

Clarity of Purpose and Youth Work Identity

The initial findings showed that research participants viewed youth work as neither having a clear definition nor clarity of purpose. The youth work practitioners, while not unified on the reasons for this phenomenon, shared an array of differing views and perspectives. Whilst it is problematic to infer generalisable meaning from such a small qualitative study, it is noteworthy that the lack of clarity in youth work's purpose was more pronounced for the men and the voluntary sector respondents. It would be speculation to further deduce greater transferability or generalisability from the analysis of these findings. Suffice to state that the data may indicate a need for further investigative research regarding the importance of youth work's clarity as it relates to both gender and the voluntary sector.

Although not all respondents were perplexed by youth work's lack of clarity a number suggested that it was an issue. Emanating from 15 interviewees, two broad explanations emerged for the lack of clarity. The first suggested that the sheer diversity of perspectives on youth work and the breadth of ensuing activities lessen the possibility of gaining clarity of purpose. This sentiment concurs with Banks (2010), who identifies the broad spectrum of activities which are labelled as youth work. She further suggests that the gap between 'ideal' youth work and 'reality' may be indicative of the profession's immaturity and inconsistency. Consequently, she alludes to youth work having an *"identity crisis"* (ibid., p.7).

Youth work having an 'identity crisis' may be at the core of the respondents' concerns regarding the lack of clarity in youth work's raison d'être. The respondents recognised a dissonance between the ideal of youth work and the

breadth of their actual practice. Because of this potential identity crisis youth workers were not able to articulate youth work in its own terms, but rather, it was defined in contrary terms of ‘what it is not’. This notion will be further discussed later in this chapter under ‘developing theory’.

A second explanation offered for the lack of clarity relates to the difficulty in communicating youth work. This is epitomised in the following quote, as one stated, ***“I don’t think it’s lacking in clarity, I think it’s lacking in communicating the clarity… because people use different words to describe the same thing”*** (7FSC). From the sample, it is clear that differing words and phrases were used to describe the same thing, and stories were often used to illustrate meaning. This finding concurs with Jean Spence’s (2007) assertion that communicating youth work effectively is difficult given its nature and a reliance on anecdote to explain its purpose.

This was not the only reason given; the complex nature of youth work was also found to create difficulties in communicating with clarity. Consequently, the respondents thought it was sometimes perplexing to know what is meant when practitioners discuss youth work. The array of emphases, meaning and perspectives makes youth work problematic to communicate. These findings run parallel with the complexity of definition found in the literature review and the array of vocabulary and meaning attributed to defining the purpose of youth work. The findings are illustrative of the dichotomies and emphases found in the youth work literature. While there is a definite overlap between writers, there are several debates and emphases within the British and Irish parlance of youth work (see pages 179ff). The breadth of emphasis found in the literature pertains to such aspects as the defining features or principles of youth work (Davies

2005, 2015; Ord 2009; Jeffs and Smith 2010), to what extent youth work should have a curriculum (Ord 2007, 2016a) or whether it is about personal and social development (Merton et al., 2004) or moral philosophy (Young 2006). As such, this array of issues and focuses makes it difficult to communicate not only because of the complexity of meaning but also because of the contested definition. While the literature seeks to develop coherence, the findings show practitioners to be less clear, showing a sporadic use of language and a lack of consistency.

The findings demonstrate a need for greater clarity in the definition and purpose of youth work. It also illustrates a diverse understanding and differing views. Davies (2010) corresponds with this finding, similarly recognising that youth work is a contested concept. He suggests that it is difficult to define the purpose of youth work as it has always been a matter of fierce debate (ibid., p.1). Furthermore, the findings concur with Ingram and Harris (2001) who suggest several reasons for the lack of clarity which are akin to those outlined previously. They identify youth workers' uncertainty, asserting that they can be perceived as *"woolly minded"* (Ingram and Harris 2001, p.17). Although the participants viewed youth work as lacking clarity the caricature of being woolly minded does not fully align with the data. Many participants showed clarity in articulating their understanding of the defining characteristics, purpose and processes of youth work, however, the uniformity of definition was less consistent.

Distinctive and Defining Characteristic of Youth Work

The findings show that, when asked about the defining features of youth work, only a few of the respondents offered a view on their understanding and with quite a narrow focus. Furthermore, as the youth workers discussed the

distinctive characteristics of youth work no reference was made to literature or theoretical perspectives. Rather than offer clear reasoning and succinct defining characteristics, the respondents were drawn to broad principles (see page 176ff). The participants embraced various principles such as the notion of choice, freedom and being young person centred.

Although there were some ideas presented about the defining characteristics of youth work the clarity or succinctness as found in the literature was not so evident. According to the literature youth work has several characteristics and defining features. These characteristics are related to the age specific nature of youth work (Department of Education NI 2003; Welsh Assembly Government 2007) voluntary participation (Ord 2009; Davies 2005, 2015) association (Jeffs and Smith 2010), democracy (Jeffs and Smith 2005; In Defence of Youth Work 2011) and education and welfare (Jeffs and Smith 2005; Ord 2016a).

The age specific nature of youth work was neither commented upon nor contested. While there is some variation in national jurisdictions this defining feature that youth work is age specific to young people between ages 8 and 20, was assumed by the research participants as a norm. A few of the respondents mentioned the welfare aspects of youth work but it was barely noticeable in the data. Furthermore, the concept of association was not specifically mentioned. Nonetheless, while not explicitly stated, these defining characteristics were implicit within the interviews and focus groups. Within the data collected the most explicit references were made to the defining features of democracy, the voluntary principle and the importance of being young person centred.

The voluntary principle, while dominant in the interviews, was only discussed fleetingly in the focus groups. In both focus groups the principle was noticeable by its lack of presence. Although the concept is thought of as imperative, this principle of working with the young person in a voluntary relationship was not deemed to be a universal or necessary feature of youth work. The focus groups barely mentioned the principle and the two distinct comments which were made showed a divided opinion. One aligned with the fundamental principle as Jeffs and Smith (2010) articulate it, while the other saw youth work without necessarily having a 100% voluntary relationship, more akin to the views of Ord (2009). Whether it is a defining and necessary feature of youth work (Davies 2005; Jeffs and Smith 2010), or a principle which focuses on the nature of the relationship with the young person (Ord 2016a), the concept was not expressed universally nor consistently by the focus groups. Although this principle is deemed an important concept in youth work literature (Davies 2005; Ord 2009; Jeffs and Smith 2010) the focus groups did not give it the same importance.

The interviewees were more definite in their views of this voluntary principle. However, rather than articulating the nuanced understandings expressed by either Ord (2009) or Jeffs and Smith (2010), the principle was embraced more broadly. Although there was some specific articulation of the voluntary principle a number of the respondents more readily emphasised the concept of choice. While choice differs from the voluntary principle, it is noteworthy that it was expressed more overtly. The idea of choice in youth work was contrasted with the young person's experience of school where there was perceived to be a limited capacity to choose. One respondent commented that youth work is ***"not compulsory, it's not a school thing"*** (5MVC) demonstrating evidence of this

sentiment. Conversely, the literature makes little reference to a distinction between school and youth work in terms of choice, indicating the respondents' negative reactivity towards formal education.

While there was a dominant emphasis on the notion of choice, this was not the only way in which the defining characteristics were framed. The respondents presented the defining characteristics in a negative way, framing youth work not by what it is, but by what it is not. The juxtaposition was continually articulated that youth work is not formal education, it is not school, and it is not teaching. The respondents' stated non-alignment to formal education showed some disregard to learning which takes place in schools. However, this reactive response could be determined by several more objective factors. These factors can be categorised into three broad areas. Firstly, youth work does not have an instrumental curriculum as with the formal education sector. A second factor which may be at the basis of this reactivity is that youth work, while educative, is an entirely different type of education to that found in schools. Thirdly, the discipline of youth work has only recently become an all degree profession within the last 8 years while the formal sector has required a degree for more than 40. Nonetheless the apparent reactivity and defensiveness from the sample is worthy of further analysis.

Whilst the defensiveness is not fully explicable, the first two of the above factors are borne out in the literature. A formal education curriculum is structured around content and outcomes. Ord (2016a) suggests that when education is based upon content, then the consequential learning is about transmission. Furthermore, Freire (1973) suggests that this is a banking concept of education whereby the teachers transmit information and ideas to the learner. While

somewhat of a caricature of formal education, there is a stronger emphasis on instrumental outcomes such as GCSEs and A levels. The data indicates a reaction to these types of formal and predetermined outcomes for youth work. Furthermore, the type of education specifically desired by the youth workers is one whereby the young person has an element of control and power. The educational outcomes of youth work, Ord (2016) suggests, are informal and not pre-determined but rather emerge through a set of complex processes. As Davies (2005) intimates, the power within the education process should be tipped in favour of the young person and they should be the focus in determining the educational outcomes of youth work.

Given the respondents' reaction to the outcomes and processes perceived within a school context, their emphasis on the educative purpose of youth work is clear. Not seeing themselves as 'teachers' while strongly emphasised, did not preclude the idea that they were educators, albeit in an informal context. Moreover, they saw youth work as an educative process. This thinking was evident when asked specifically about the purpose of youth work. While the respondents did not perceive education as the only purpose, it dominated the discourse.

Education as a Primary Purpose of Youth Work

A central concern of this study is to ascertain how youth workers perceive the purpose of youth work and how their understanding relates to the processes by which youth work engages young people. In both data collection phases of the study, the sample was specifically asked about the purpose of youth work. All respondents attempted to define the purpose. Within the two focus groups the purpose of youth work was defined but there was a lack of detail, and the practitioners were not thorough in their definitions. Nonetheless, throughout there

was a clear commitment expressed about core principles, youth development and the assumption that youth work is educational. In turn, the interviewees gave additional and complementary material which created greater depth in understanding the purpose of youth work.

The purpose of youth work was articulated by the interviewees and there was consensus about its educative role with young people. The term ‘personal and social development’, central to the Northern Ireland Youth Work Curriculum (Department of Education 2003), was used by two thirds of the interviewees. However, once pressed, the respondents evolved the term into statements about the educative role and learning opportunities which youth work affords to young people. The dominance of the Northern Ireland Youth Work Curriculum (ibid.), the Model for Effective Practice, as a reference point was common. This ‘model’ (ibid.) has dominated the parlance of community youth work in Northern Ireland for just over 30 years since its original inception. As Scott-McKinley (2016) intimates, the curriculum has demanded a level of compliance. With compliance comes a dominant discourse and it is difficult to see how other interpretations of youth work’s purpose can be sustained or validated. This was borne out in the data collection phase, but the youth workers who referred to the model were less able to articulate depth in their understanding. This meant that some relied heavily on the language of the curriculum rather than on broader youth work concepts.

While curriculum is not unique to the Northern Ireland context (see Ord 2016a), the dominating force ‘a model for effective practice’ (Department of Education 2003) seems to have shaped the parlance and definition of non-formal and informal education. At the core of this curriculum document is an emphasis on

personal and social development. This is further enshrined in values such as equity, diversity and interdependence and principles which include testing values and beliefs, participation and acceptance and understanding of others (ibid.) Throughout the data collection phase, the language and emphasis of the curriculum dominated the discourse. While this uniformity could be viewed as a strength it may be a cause in the lack of critical and theoretical discourse amongst the research participants. Grappling with the notions presented in, for example, participative dialogue as outlined by Freire (1970) is less convenient than relying on the formulaic reasoning of a curriculum document.

The Northern Ireland youth work curriculum document is situated within an educational policy framework. While the curriculum was initially imposed and then integrated, ultimately, it went through a period of indecision (McKinley 2016). This state of flux may have led to stagnation with practitioners using the curriculum parlance but with minimal depth. Furthermore, the alignment of youth work to a policy situated in a Department of Education, weakens broader social political and critical pedagogical discourse and practice. Arguably, a curriculum mandated by a government body will gravitate towards the status quo rather than bring about the social change that only a few of the respondents promoted.

The curriculum and related Department of Education parlance (for example Priorities for Youth) continue to dominate the sector. Although not all youth work resides within this domain, the dominant discourse has permeated the language of the youth workers interviewed. Alternative models were not forthcoming, and neither were other theoretical paradigms. The array of curriculum and policy developments may have smothered creativity and inventive ways of framing or discussing youth work. This might explain the lack of political language which

could counter a government-based curriculum or the theoretical discourse which would offer a more substantive framework to a philosophically weak curriculum. Although conjecture, these explanations could be investigated within future research.

Broadly, the research participants utilised similar words and terminology to those of the youth work writers, the depth of definition and insight was lacking at times. Many of the respondents concurred with the basic ideas of Merton et al (2004) that youth work is to encourage independence. Others emphasised the holistic development of young people as outlined by the National Occupational Standards (2014). By far the most dominant focus for the sample was the educational role of youth work. This educational emphasis in the purpose of youth work coincides with Mahoney (2001), Sapin (2009) and Jeffs (2011). The terms social and educational have become central themes which have been embraced within much of the recent literature (Devlin and Gunning 2009; Batsleer and Davies 2010; Jeffs and Smith 2010; Ord 2016). However, the more nuanced depth of critical understanding as outlined by Batsleer (2008) or Young (2006) is less apparent.

Examples were evident throughout; no one suggested that the purpose of youth work was, as Young (2006, p.56) intimates, *"the process of moral philosophising"* to enable young people to take charge of their lives. Neither did anyone explicitly suggest that youth work was a critical or political force which is sometimes counter cultural. As Batsleer (2010, p. 153) suggests, youth work often takes up a critical stance, in a place of *"permanent opposition"* to the status quo, arguing for political change and development. A radical voice of this nature was only

present within two of the sample and the political aspect of youth work's purpose had very little emphasis.

At the initial phase of this investigation the researcher deliberated as to whether youth work had clarity of purpose, defining characteristics and a specific identity. Furthermore, it was hoped that youth workers would be able to articulate the purpose of their profession and communicate it effectively. While the research participants deemed that the purpose of youth work lacks clarity, they could present some defining characteristics, principles and even discuss the purpose. Overall, the respondents saw the purpose of youth work as educational but not in a narrow sense. Rather, they viewed the nature of youth work as being holistic with a wider purpose than that expressed in some of the literature and the youth work curriculum (DENI 2003).

The respondents were less able to present a youth work identity than the researcher had supposed. However, this is mitigated by many external factors which may contribute to the woolly thinking of which Ingram and Harris (2001) write. Currently the youth work sector is in a state of change with differing and sometimes rival agendas. The youth worker is arguably stretched further with added bureaucracy, competing draws on energy and a policy and structural framework which has been in a state of flux for a number of years. Nonetheless, while not exhibiting a great depth of understanding, the research participants owned a set of core principles relating to personal emancipation, accompaniment, welfare and education. While this 'big picture' thinking dominated the language of purpose, it was not operationalised in any practical sense until the respondents spoke about the processes in which they engaged with young people. Although these processes were taken in turn at the data

collection phase and presented separately in the findings chapter, the subsequent section will discuss and analyse the results as they relate to the processes in totality.

Engaging Young People through 4 Key Processes

The findings show that while participants had a sense of youth work's purpose it was contested. As such, the premise of the researcher was to explore why this might be and ascertain how best to understand youth work and define it more clearly. Young (2006) outlines the example of Plato's dialogues to illustrate the point. Rather than give a definition of courage Laches tells Socrates of its nature (Young 2006, p8). So, it is with youth work: its nature, the defining characteristics and the processes by which it engages are easier to discuss than its definition or purpose. Hitherto, this study has explored the broad purpose of youth work yet without much greater clarity of definition. Nevertheless, understanding how the respondents viewed the defining characteristics and nature of youth work has produced greater depth. Furthermore, when asked about the processes by which youth workers engaged, there was even more depth of discussion. It is therefore these processes which have been investigated more fully to ascertain if greater depth of insight could be gained. As a consequence, the processes by which youth workers engage young people have become the primary focus in this aspect of the study.

Gallagher and Morgan (2013) claim that the ultimate product or outcome of youth work is the process by which youth workers engage young people. However, rather than one single process there are a number. While the respondents suggested a few more processes than those presented in the review of literature there was little deviation from the four outlined. These four are relationship building; conversation and dialogue; participation and learning through/from experience. It is therefore these four processes and their relationship to the purpose of youth work which will be analysed and discussed in this section.

Relationship Building is Fundamental

The importance of building relationships with young people was prominent in the parlance of the entire sample. The suggestion that relationship building is fundamental was common among the focus groups as with the interviewees. This starting point demonstrated the importance of relationship building as a process and helped in understanding its purpose within youth work. The interviewees were more forthright than the focus group members with their perception that the relationship building process is paramount. Without it, some suggested, nothing could be achieved with young people. While sometimes a caricature of youth work, the relationship building process was not seen as a purpose but a basis for the work with the young person. It was said to facilitate the building of skills and trust while at the same time supporting young people to learn. As two interviewees expressed it; relationship building creates the ***"space for change"*** (7FSC) to bring about transformation. Relationship building was thought to create a safe space to challenge the young people thereby leading to the possibility of learning. This evidence aligns with the prominence relationship building has within the youth work literature (Davies 2005, 2015; Ord 2007; Blacker 2010; Batsleer 2008; Sapin 2013) and the aims of such a process.

Two of the respondents referred to the notion of relationship building as a 'luxury' which other professions and disciplines do not possess. While this is a debatable idea there was further commentary on the type of relationship which youth workers have with young people. The rapport which youth workers create with young people was again contrasted with the type of relationships found in schools. This contrast does not necessarily reflect the stereotype that youth workers are fun, and teachers are not. Rather, the focus is on the nature of the relationship and its purpose. The task for teachers was viewed to be more akin

to the instrumental learning which Habermas (1972) highlights. Instrumental learning refers to the *"acquisition of skills and understanding needed to control the world we live in"* (Rogers 1996, p.15). Although there is a clear cross over between youth work and formal education, the respondents argued that they were not engaged in this type of, what they perceived as, instrumental learning. It was clear that the workers aspired to learning processes which were not instrumental. However, some of the respondents had a particularly narrow interpretation of the current government policy, Priorities for Youth (Department of Education 2013), and had engaged in instrumental and formal educational outputs and outcomes. They perceived the policy required them to deliver formal qualifications and training programmes. Despite their reservations regarding formal education many of the workers discussed how they promoted the acquisition of formal qualifications and achievements.

Consequently, the researcher perceived that the paramountcy of the relationship or the building thereof is more aspirational than the youth workers' reality suggests. While the respondents saw themselves as quite distinct from teachers and formal education, they were frequently delivering similar outputs and working to comparable outcomes. This seems like a contradiction as there was a clear desire for a critical distance between themselves and teachers. The paramountcy of relationship building was less evident when the focus became the qualification or certificate. In some instances, their work had become more like that of a caricatured formal education context, with less of an emphasis on the relationship and more on outcomes. The pressure to work to outcomes was tangible and created tensions for workers who are focussed primarily on building purposeful relationships with young people.

The findings showed a strong emphasis on the nature of relationships which youth workers are trying to create. The commitment to the young person was continually stressed and the notion of walking alongside them was prominent. Christian and Green (1998) discuss this latter idea using the term 'accompanying' and have likened it to a 'journey' with the young person. These metaphors were not lost on the respondents who recognised that the journey was not for its own sake but more purposeful. The aligned ideas of Christian and Green support such an emphasis. They suggest, accompanying helps establish and maintain the young person's *"physical, mental and spiritual health and creativity" (*Christian and Green 1998, p.21). The respondents favoured the idea of 'accompanying' young people on their terms rather than work to presupposed agendas. The literature reflects the findings which highlighted the notion of youth workers metaphorically and literally walking alongside young people. Batsleer (2008) and previously Christian and Green (1998) liken the relationship to that of an accompanist in the context of music. In this context the creative musical outcome is produced through the relationship achieved.

The concept of accompaniment was expressed by the respondents but there was little explicit reference to broader theoretical ideas pertaining to relationship building. However, the type of relationship sought with young people and the expressed purpose implicitly resonated with the work of Carl Rogers (1902-1987). Emphasised throughout the data were the three core conditions which Rogers (1967) viewed as sufficient for an educative relationship. The respondents alluded to these core conditions of unconditional positive regard, empathic understanding and congruence (Rogers 1967; Rogers and Freiberg 1994) and there was an occasional explicit reference. However, more commonly,

implicit references were made to these conditions. The respondents talked of the need for a non-judgemental relationship that had high levels of acceptance for the young person. The need to show understanding was also recognised and the condition that was referred to least was congruence. This corresponds with how Rogers (1967) saw the three core conditions.

It was notable that the research participants mentioned congruence least in their deliberations. Rogers (1967) believed congruence was the most difficult of the three conditions to perfect, but he thought of it as the most important (Natiello 2001). Its difficulty to grasp and practice may have meant that the youth workers tacitly avoided it in their practice. Nonetheless, their draw to challenging the young people to bring about learning was at the centre of their thinking. According to the literature, being congruent or genuine means that if the relationship with the learner is free from façade and is real, then the educator will be more effective (Rogers and Freiberg 1994). The stress on developing genuine relationships with young people was paramount for all the respondents and illustrates a core component in the relationship building process. Nevertheless, while implicit within the data, the three core conditions of Carl Rogers' person-centred approach to learning, could have been more explicitly referenced.

It was not surprising that Rogers' (1967) person centred approach and the three core conditions featured tacitly in the discussion with the research participants. However, as the Rogerian perspective and parlance is taught at Ulster University as a central element, the lack of explicit references was more perplexing. Eighteen of the twenty-four interviewees had been part of a community youth work course at Ulster University. However, there was little explicit reference to Rogers' core conditions as a basis for the relationship building process within

their practice. This may show that they have assumed awareness and integration of the Rogerian parlance, but it is significant that it was explicitly mentioned so infrequently. Nevertheless, the primary emphasis on relationship building and its nature would indicate that, while the parlance and theoretical awareness was weak, the commitment to the Rogerian person-centred process was strong. The sample acknowledged that, although the absence of certain conditions may still produce significant outcomes in youth work, the quality of youth work suffers if the relationship is not fundamental.

The respondents expressed several dilemmas and some caution relating to the place of relationship building in their practice (see pages 185ff). The current policy emphasis on outcomes was disturbing for some of the respondents yet welcomed by a few. It was thought that greater emphasis on outcomes meant that the time to build relationships would be lost. The counter-argument expressed a need for more clearly defined outcomes and intentionality with young people. As one person said, "***it's about outcomes for young people and it's about progression for young people"*** (3FSC). Although this quote was not aligned to a set of pre-determined outcomes it was inferred that there can be an over-emphasis on relationship for its own sake. Conversely, over focussing on pre-determined outcomes was thought, by many more respondents, to get in the way of sincere and genuine relationship building.

The data showed that relationships with power tipped in favour of the young person and when learning is negotiated and wrought in partnership, is perceived to be under threat. The Department of Education's youth work policy, curriculum and current discussion represent a push towards more instrumental and outcome-based forms of learning. This push is represented in the guise of the

recent policy, Priorities for Youth (Department of Education 2013), a curriculum in the form of a module for effective practice (Department of Education 2003) and the current discussions on outcomes by the practice development group (ongoing). Although not exclusively instrumental learning, as outlined by Habermas (1972), this focus certainly militates against the emphasis on phronesis which Ord (2016) promotes. The relationships which the respondents talked about had more in common with the experiential concept of phronesis than other forms of learning. Relationships which help to bring about wisdom and enable a freedom to learn were the focus of their youth work. This type of emphasis aligns well with the view of Habermas (1972) who names this type of learning as emancipatory. Allied to the notions of phronesis and emancipation delineated by Ord (2016) and Habermas (1972) respectively, Mezirow (2003, 2009) suggests transformative learning is the outcome of participative and relationship centred educational processes. While the research participants did not articulate such a complex thesis, their dilemmas demonstrated the void of a counter-argument to the dominant discourse which emphasises outcomes. With outcomes so firmly fixed as a youth work agenda, the primacy of the relationship with the young person is viewed as becoming less significant. The need to better articulate the place of relationship building and justify its paramountcy was evident from the dilemmas and discussion of the research participants.

Several dilemmas and issues exist for the youth workers engaged in this study. These pertain to the current policy focus, the centrality of the relationship, the theoretical basis for such a process and the aspiration for power to be more equally distributed. However, the dominant emphasis from the respondents was of the prioritisation of the relationship building process and its centrality to the

purpose of youth work. Nevertheless, the participants perceived a threat from current policy (Priorities for Youth) and its emphasis on outcomes rather than young person led agendas. The external pressure from policy has created a tension for the participants whereby they feel they are expected to focus on outcomes and outputs rather than the relationship with the young person. The traditional notion that relationship building is a central process to youth work practice was perceived as being less of a government priority. It is questionable whether this tension truly exists or is merely a perception, but it is worthy of further consideration.

Conversation and Dialogue

Although all participants were asked about conversation and dialogue in their practice it was not initially prioritised as highly as relationship building. Some respondents talked of conversation in inspirational terms while others initially glossed over the process but subtly showed how they frequently engaged young people in this type of dialogue. This evidence demonstrates varying degrees of awareness regarding the process and place of conversation and dialogue. However, while there was some ambivalence, the evidence shows the importance for such a process and practice of conversation. In many instances the process of conversation and dialogue was inextricably linked with that of relationship building. Some of the respondents saw one leading to the other with more prioritising relationship building before conversation. These minor contradictions illustrate the intertwined relationship between these two processes across the youth work parlance and epistemology. Implicit are two contrasting views that conversation leads to relationships with young people, or that building a relationship is a way of enabling the conversation to move deeper. This intertwined connection between these two processes demonstrates

interdependence within the type of learning which is being achieved. This reflects the connection made by Mezirow (2003) in deciphering how dialogue and building strong relationships work to enable transformative learning. He outlines the vital part which relationship building plays in creating a critical discourse with the learner.

While the level of critical discourse was not something which the respondents discussed in any depth there is no doubt that they saw it because of considered and purposeful conversation. Dialogue and conversation were referred to as a process to get beyond the initial contact and rapport and ***"getting them*** (the young people) ***to think and develop things for themselves"*** (8MVP). The literature indicates that moving beyond the initial phase of Grice's (1975) 'cooperative principle' is essential in surpassing the initial chit chat and banter to more intentional and purposeful engagement with the young person (Ord 2016a). Furthermore, deepening the discourse aligns with Jeffs and Smith's (2005) view of conversation and the level of engagement that is needed to help facilitate change. The authors promote the idea of 'trusting in conversation' in order to be with the young person *"rather than seeking to act upon them"* (ibid., p.31). The respondents recognised that this type of conversation fosters a two-way relationship and brings about understanding and learning. All the research participants saw the two-way nature of the conversation as promoting a more equal learning environment.

The respondents identified an undoubted purpose for the process of conversation and dialogue. However, few explicitly mentioned theoretical perspectives, models or concepts yet their responses were aligned to ideas found in the literature. A purpose of dialogue according to Freire (1970) is to

create a critical consciousness and awareness within the learner. While not referring directly to Freire, some of the interviewees were firmly rooted in his conceptual thinking. Developing a critical consciousness is a primary focus of Freire's view of dialogue. Freire (2007, p.40) refers to this process as the development of critical consciousness whereby, "*critical understanding leads to critical action".* The focus for the youth work practitioners was to enable young people to think more deeply about themselves and in turn change or act upon their new thinking. The youth worker's role, as suggested by one respondent, is to draw out what the young person is saying and challenge them ***"to do something better"*** (11FVP) or as another put it ***"I believe it's through conversation that young people change"*** (22MSP). This emphasis on change certainly aligns well to the action orientation focus which Freire (1970) advocates.

The respondents stated that it was important to explore issues on an equal basis rather than the assumed hierarchical relationship of formal educators. Again, a dominant assumption of the respondents was that they were a different type of educator in that the young person would have ***"complete ownership"*** (18FSP). This high aspiration delineates the notion of power tipped in favour of the young person (Rogers 1967; Davies 2005) within the learning process and juxtaposes youth work against the formal education of schools. The ideas of Martin Büber resonated with the aspirations of the respondents who thought of conversation as a two-way process which endeavours to find mutual ground. This philosophical perspective reaches for what Büber (1970) suggests is the 'space between' and intimates a levelling out of a potential power imbalance between talker and listener.

Similarly, the ideas expressed by the research participants aligns well to Bakhtin's (1981) understanding of conversation. His concepts have been utilised in both formal and informal educational contexts (Matusov 2011). In the informal educational context of youth work Bakhtin (1981) offers a useful theoretical perspective in understanding the outcome of conversation. He states that truth is not owned by one person but *"it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction"* (Bakhtin 1981, p.110). As the respondents talked of dialogue they spoke of an interaction where both parties would ideally be equal, and how the conversation should not be controlled by either party. One respondent illustrated the point by framing conversation as a process where ***"you're not really in control"*** (2NVC) as both young person and youth worker are trying to work towards what is right. This type of educational process promotes both parties taking power. Conversation was perceived to be a two-way dialogical exchange.

These kinds of perceptions showed a desire for power relationships with young people that are different to other 'everyday life' exchanges. Freire (1970) suggests that dialogue and conversation, alongside creating a critical consciousness, is about achieving greater equality between the learner and the educator. He suggests that it is not one working for the other but rather it is in an equal partnership and a co-learning environment which is being created. Bakhtin (1986) argues that learning is essentially dialogical and two-way. Dialogue of this nature, Freire (1970) suggests, is to emancipate in a way that emphasises equality of educator and participant and creates ownership of the learning. Starting with the young person, enabling them to determine the issues and find

the answers for themselves was an emancipatory notion expressed by all respondents as they spoke of the purpose of conversation.

While the idea of 'ownership' was not held by all, there was a definite draw to conversation because it created greater equality between the young person and the youth worker. This approach is not about telling but actively listening and hearing the young person. One respondent made an aligned comment saying, ***"it's actually hearing what they*** (young people) ***are saying not just nodding your head"*** that brings about the change. This concurs with Mezirow (2003) who argues that conversation involves high levels of interpersonal skills and insight. He denotes these skills as *"having an open mind, learning to listen empathetically, 'bracketing' premature judgment, and seeking common ground"* (ibid., p. 60). This type of empathic understanding is associated to the emphasis of Rogers and shows how conversation and dialogue are inextricably linked to the core conditions of the person-centred approach (Rogers and Freiberg 1994).

The respondent's emphasis on sharing power with young people was at the core of their views on conversation. While there was no explicit reference to the views expressed in the work of Büber (1970), Freire (1970), Bakhtin (1981) and Mezirow (2003) the respondents suggested that sharing power was central to their work with young people. This was the core reason for being drawn to conversation. The tacit and explicit support for engaging with young people on an equal basis meant the needs would be met and addressed through dialogue rather than a predetermined agenda or curricula. When power is distributed more equally between the youth worker and the young person then a consensual and agreed outcome was viewed as the result. Mezirow (2003) deems this type of learning partnership as transformative.

While no one explicitly discussed Habermas (1987), he poses even greater potential for dialogue and conversation which may help in framing some of the respondent's thinking. His theory of communicative action offers a lens to explore the ideas which were discussed by the respondents. Central to his thinking is the idea that *"we are always motivated towards consensus in speech"* (Warren 1995, p.180). Ewert (1991, p. 364) adds a further perspective by asserting that all the reviewed writers in his study *"accept Habermas's idea that true discourse must be constraint free".* It is, therefore, the absence of constraint in equal and shared spaces that conversation can enable open learning to take place. This aspiration for constraint free conversation was evident from all the respondents. The desire to have open conversations free from constraint was a definite feature amongst those promoting dialogue and conversation in their youth work practice. This may mean as one respondent intimated that you are not really in control. Habermas (1984) acknowledges this is a sophisticated form of dialogue that necessitates a high degree of maturity on behalf of the participants to create open and honest discourse. If young people are infantilised, then the power balance will remain with the adult worker and the growth and ultimate transformative learning will therefore be stunted. The type of open discourse which leads to new knowledge and understanding is aspirational within much of the writing on dialogue (See also Buber 1947; Freire 1970, 1995; Bakhtin 1984). However, Habermas (1984, 1987) is more ambitious, extending the potential for dialogue to encompass social transformation at a macro level. Although few of the respondents explicitly discussed the political or macro potential of dialogue it was not completely absent from the discourse. There are contentious claims by both the respondents and writers concerning the capacity of conversation and dialogue to bring about change and transformation

in both the individual and society. Nevertheless, at the heart of this dialogical process there is a desire to bring about learning which is wrought from more equal partnerships between young people and youth workers. While beyond the scope of this study it would be useful to understand how the practice measures against the aspirations.

The interdependent relationship between these first two processes is not immediately evident from the data and the respondents made few explicit connections. However, there was cross cutting language used in discussing each of the processes that shows some interconnection. The literature suggests that conversation is strongly associated with relationship building (Buber 1947; Freire 1970; Rogers 1977) and there are also defined connections with the process of participation (Dewey 2007) and experience (Dewey 1997). As the findings are further analysed the relationship between the processes will become more evident and the correlation will be further examined and explicated.

Participation

As respondents described their understanding and views of participation it was evident that a wide range of perspectives persisted. The views ranged from a basic understanding relating to voluntarily participating with others. This moved towards an emphasis on young people taking ownership, extending to a view that participation is a democratic and political process. The diversity of views represented illustrated a lack of consistent understanding of the process. Furthermore, a political and democratic perspective of participation was surprisingly weak given the range of respondents own political diversity and differing insights. Nevertheless, there was a residual understanding of participation which stemmed from the youth work curriculum, a Model for

Effective Practice (Department of Education 2003). The language around participation was, on the whole, quite basic and showed the influence of this model. However, as this curriculum document (ibid.) endeavours to simplify youth work language (Scott-McKinley 2016) it was not unanticipated to see a fairly basic understanding from the respondents. Whilst this simplistic thinking was dominant there was also evidence of other sophisticated ideas.

An initial response stated that if a young person voluntarily ***"decides to turn up and do something with a youth worker – that's participation"*** (1MSP). While this definition of participation reflects a basic understanding, there is something intrinsic to the sentiment presented. The premise of this view on participation is akin to the previously outlined voluntary principle (Davies 2005; Jeffs and Smith 2010; Ord 2009). Fundamentally those interviewees who support the process of participation did so from their initial engagement with young people believing that participation must be a voluntary act. There was a rudimentary understanding of the concept, but there was an assumption that the starting point for youth work is this voluntary principle. While no one specifically stated this was a prerequisite for youth work, the idea was implicit within the discourse. In an era where youth work is changing to a focus on outcomes (Morgan 2009; Scott-McKinley 2016; Ord 2016) there is a need to review the voluntary principle as a starting point and defining characteristic (Davies 2005) for working with young people. Ord (2009) proposes such a review of the voluntary principle, arguing for a wider interpretation of the concept given the current policy and practice context of youth work.

A second emphasis in the findings regarding participation was that of young people taking ownership of their space and the youth work in which they engage.

While behind this idea lay the notion of just taking part, the respondents went further. Their thinking extended to a more fulsome claim that ownership related to power and control. The vocabulary included ideas about young people having their say in the issues that affect them; 'having their voices heard'; 'control'; 'ownership' and 'power'. Respondents showed gravitation towards participation as a process but there were few articulating its meaning beyond a basic understanding of the youth work curriculum. While no actual models or participation continuums were explicitly defined there was some inference of wider understanding and more complex ideas.

Within the sample, the dichotomy between a 'laissez faire' approach to participation and something more intentional was evident. One focus group member spoke of the need for an ***"organic-ness"*** and ***"the young people directing where it goes"*** (focus group 1)***.*** Although this approach is young person led he suggested there is still a need for a facilitator. While somewhat laissez faire, the focus group member emphasised the centrality of the young person in the decision-making process. However, an interviewee was much more purposeful in stating that young people are citizens in the here and now. She critiqued the curriculum's stance regarding its statement on 'preparing young people for participation'. She thought of participation and active citizenship as an intentional consequence of youth work, not something to be left to chance.

There are almost thirty years of a youth work curriculum (initially 1987,1997 revised Department of Education 2003) and, alongside this, at least three participation models having prevalence in the Northern Ireland youth sector. This curriculum document has emphasised participation as one of the three core principles since 1997 (Scott-McKinley 2016) yet few mentioned this as a focus of

their understanding. Likewise, the participation ladders of Arnstein (1969) and Hart (1992), the continuum of Westhorp (1987) and the process outlined by Shier (2001, 2010), have some prevalence in the experience of the sector. Although, the parlance of these models was also used by participants there was little explicit reference to the actual theory therein. A simplified version of the language was present for most, with only a few comments moving beyond the rhetoric outlined previously (see pages 197ff). This lack of theoretical understanding articulated by the respondents was surprising given the dominance of participation and the accompanying language in the sector.

As intimated, a few of the respondents did allude to models of participation and while only one made explicit reference to Hart's (1992) ladder other perspectives were not free from theoretical thinking. However, the models to which they ascribed were in the main experimental and experiential rather than theoretically based. Respondents purported ideas such as choice and the centrality of the young person's views as pertaining to participation. While these ideas are related to the process of participation they would be lower order goals. As such, political language and thought was noticeable by its absence. Only two respondents mentioned the political and action oriented dimension of participation and another talked of civic engagement.

As previously outlined, the literature has two main focuses in relation to participation (see pages 93ff). Firstly, the process of participation has a political dimension (Arnstein 1969; Crick 2004) and, secondly, it is an educational process for increasing the learning experience (Dewey 2007). There was little emphasis on either of these perspectives from any of the respondents. In discussing participation, the lack of political aspiration was the most

unambiguous finding. Few discussed its political nature. This is a stark contrast to the participation ladder of Arnstein (1969) and Hart (1992) which point to a political dimension of the process. In these models, citizens and young people are empowered to take action in the decisions which impact upon them. Young people taking ownership in a youth setting was seen by many of the respondents as a pinnacle of participation yet Crick (2004) Arnstein (1969) and, to a lesser extent, Hart (1992) have much higher aspirations to mobilise citizens to action.

As with the political emphasis of participation, a secondary purpose of deepening the learning process showed little evidence in the findings. This second emphasis in the literature refers to participation as a democratic ideal within the educational process, in that democracy in education fosters deeper learning and understanding (Dewey 2007). Dewey suggests this is brought about by a deeper reliance on each other and creates a *"change in social habit"* (ibid., p.67). The data's emphasis on the creation of ownership and offering choice goes some way in affirming Dewey's ideas but lacks the depth of insight to which he aspired. Furthermore, Dewey (1997, p.67) argues that the learner should be participating in the learning process and criticises traditional education for its inability to *"secure the active co-operation of the pupil"*. The respondents did not talk of participation as a process that they wanted to foster, rather, the focus had closer alignment with the Northern Ireland youth work curriculum and the Department of Education policy.

While a lack of depth was inferred from the respondents regarding participation, all thought of it as a vital process of youth work. However, the process was not viewed without criticism. The most prominent criticism regarded the insubstantial nature of the process within youth work practice. One indicative response stated,

"it has become so tokenistic" (1MSP) and thought of it as shallow. This reactivity to tokenistic participation dominated the discourse across the sample. The criticism extended beyond the perceived tokenism to the unrealistic expectations of the process. The dominant discourse within the sector suggests that participation should be a high priority. However, the youth workers interviewed had; a simplistic view which met the perceived curriculum agenda; an understanding that they were working participatively but were not (see page 199); or, a view that the participation agenda was irrelevant and tokenistic. The political aspirations for participation held by two or three respondents was much less dominant but illustrated their frustration with a sector that they perceived to be giving mixed messages to its youth workers.

Furthermore, it is difficult to see how the current policy (Priorities for Youth, Department of Education 2013) emphasis, in supporting young people to achieve 5 GCSEs or more, will allow for young people taking control of their programmes, let alone a youth centre. One respondent talked of how difficult it was to have a focus on participation ***"because of the expectations from Priorities for Youth and the Education Authority"*** (9FVC). She perceived the demands which the policy placed upon her as a contradiction to the principles and process of participation. The clash of culture in desiring youth workers to support instrumental outcomes while at the same time encouraging participation seemed anathema. The cynicism of those thinking participation is a tokenistic process was palpable. The emphasis on power sharing or the youth led focus of participation was felt to be under threat if the policy framework implicitly makes the demand for predetermined outcomes.

One respondent expressed more complex ideas which were closely aligned to Wierenga's perspective on participation. Wierenga (2003) suggests that there are three components which make for good practice (see pages 102ff). The three elements relate to the connectedness, meaning and control which the young people possess in the process of participation. When participation occurs without control, connectedness or meaning, Wierenga (2003, p.69) suggests, young people end up as manipulated, alienated or decision-less. Transferring these three components to the study under scrutiny the researcher analysed what was being said by respondents. When they reflected upon their practice most of the participation described only obtained one or two of Wierenga's elements at most. The participation practised was in the main tokenistic and showed few signs of the rich vein of thinking of which Wierenga writes.

Of the four processes explored in this study, participation was the most easily recognised by the respondents yet least understood, considering the literature. The articulation of its purpose and practice lacked the depth which would be assumed given the length of time participation has been part of the youth work parlance. Respondents showed a basic understanding of the process but, so few recognised a political or educational dimension akin to the ideas of Crick, Arnstein or Dewey. Even fewer saw participation in terms of its purpose (Farthing 2012) or of what works in practice (Wierenga 2003). Apart from one or two of the respondents, participation was viewed uncritically, an idea that is shared by Farthing (2012).

Experiential Learning and Learning Through/From Experience

While this theme was more unwieldly than the other three processes there were some important findings. An initial finding showed a greater interest from men in

the process and, while important, it is difficult to make any strong claims given the nature of this qualitative study and the sample size (N=32). Nonetheless, there were four key messages coming from the data as can be seen from the findings chapter (see pages 203ff). While the findings show a commitment to the process and an acknowledgment of its importance as it relates to youth work, the primary emphasis revealed an ambiguity in the language regarding learning through experience. The second emphasis in the data involves the place of experience in a learning context. A third emphasis was that some of the respondents were drawn to the term 'experiential learning' and, particularly to, the work of David Kolb. The final significant finding was the respondents' emphasis on reflection as a key component for learning from experience.

When conducting the focus groups and interviews the researcher consciously used the term 'learning from experience' as a broader, more inclusive phrase to encapsulate what takes place in a youth work context. While there is a close relationship to the more defined concept of experiential learning there is a difference. Usher (1993) suggests there are clear distinctions between learning from experience and experiential learning. He suggests the former involves learning taken from the context of the day to day life while experiential learning is the discourse and systematic extraction of insights gained from the experience. Nonetheless he recognises the importance of both ideas.

Similarly, Smith (2001, 2010) suggests the term experiential learning is used in two contrasting senses, one relating to a form of teaching and the other pertaining to the experience of life itself. In the context of this study, learning through experience aligns itself to the youth work cornerstone outlined by the group, 'In Defence of Youth Work' (2011) and the work of John Dewey (1997).

All respondents were asked about how they understood the place of experience, activities and experiential learning in their practice. While some gave examples of specific practice and how young people learn through experience, others were more explicit about the concept of experiential learning as outlined by Kolb (1984, 2015) (see pages 210ff). This distinction, while subtle, was not always differentiated across the research participants. The respondents mostly used the term experiential learning synonymously with 'learning through/from experience'. This loose thinking tallies with Beard and Wilson (2006, p.19) who suggest that while there are vague, indistinct and elusive definitions of experiential learning it is the *"the underpinning process to all forms of learning"*. This claim was explored throughout the focus groups and interviews.

It was apparent from the discourse and subsequent findings that there was an ambiguity in the language regarding experiential learning or learning from experience. Due to the coterminous language it was difficult to gain a clear understanding on how experience is perceived as part of the learning which takes place in a youth work setting. Consequently, the premise of the discussion on learning through experience was quite unwieldy with little distinction in the parlance utilised. This could well have been due to the researcher's ambiguous language within the data collection phase. Terms used to describe this fourth process included 'learning through experience', 'creating opportunities', 'learning through doing', 'the chance to test things out' and of course 'experiential learning'. The breadth of language meant it was difficult to know if the sample was always discussing the same process. The researcher allowed the synonymous use of all the terms as the respondents showed little understanding

of the nuances in the language. Nonetheless, there was enough uniformity from the responses to indicate the importance of experience as it relates to learning.

If, as one respondent intimated, learning through experience is the vast majority of education, then its place in youth work should be thought of as central. There is striking similarity between this respondent and Rogers (1996). He asserts *"there is a growing consensus that experience forms the basis of all learning"* (ibid., p.16). However not all respondents stated such a clear endorsement of the process. Many saw it as more incidental than fundamental and one person was unable to elaborate on their understanding at all. When asked, she said ***"I'm kind of struggling even to answer"*** (3FSC). Nevertheless, most of the respondents gave a fulsome account of their perspective and indicated that personal growth and development which leads to increased self-awareness was its purpose. This broadly placed the respondents in a particular perspective which is reflective of Weil and McGill's (1989) fourth metaphorical village (see pages 109ff) which promotes the ideas of personal growth and development.

As with the other three processes, learning through experience, does not stand alone. However, rather than the processes being interrelated as with the other three it seems that, for some of the respondents, relationship building, conversation and participation culminate in learning through experience. This idea is supported in the literature. Dewey (1997) viewed experience and education similarily (see pages113ff). He posits that at the heart of learning is the experience of the learner. This experience is not in isolation of a context nor from the relationships with others. Dewey argues that the principles of 'continuity' and 'interaction' form the basis for the learning experience. Throughout the data the respondents acknowledged that the experience with the

young person was not in isolation (continuity) and that experience should be created in a social environment (interaction). These two factors resonate with the other processes as their emphasis is on relationships, dialogue and power sharing. Within Dewey's framework, learning through experience is not in isolation from other processes. He emphasises the need for democratic and participative engagement with the learner (Dewey 2007) and views education as a dialogical process, in line with the ideas of Freire (1970). While Dewey predates Freire, there is a striking similarity.

The opportunities and experiences promoted by the research participants showed a recognition of the need to address the power dynamic in a learning environment. They again juxtaposed experiential learning within a youth work context to that of formal education. Dewey (1997) too was interested in the power relationships of education and sought to minimise its destructive influence. He intimates that traditional education did not consider the needs or power of the individual, rather, it imposed knowledge from the knowing (educator) to the unknowing (Dewey 1997). This assumption of Dewey is akin to Freire's challenge to a so-called banking theory of teaching. In challenging the dominant discourse, he contends that education is dialogical and is based on an equal relationship. This level of complexity was not immediately apparent within the sample but there was awareness that experience alone did not create deeper learning.

While not all the respondents showed an understanding of the role of experience in their youth work there was a connection between the experience and learning. This connection is evident from one respondent's perspective who said, "***when something happens, whenever some successes come about and whenever***

some failures come about, and being able to sit down and say, well, what did you learn from that?" (8MVP). The quote illustrates an integrated approach between a range of processes. In this reflection the worker assumes a relationship with the young person, enters a participative dialogue and assists the young person to make sense of their experience. Making sense of the experience and connecting it to learning is the premise of this worker's practice. This perspective lines up with youth work literature. In the youth work context, Jeffs and Smith (2005) make connections to John Dewey's ideas. They argue that the youth worker's role is to assist young people in gaining *"a greater understanding or appreciation of their experiences"* (ibid., p.59). While not showing the same complexity, the example outlined above endeavours to connect the young person with their experience and learning.

The dynamic nature of the youth work experience and the creation of a learning environment was emphasised across the data. As with the research participants, Dewey emphasises the importance of creating an environment which helped to make sense of experience. The environment in Dewey's view relates to how the external (the experience) and individual interact with the *"personal needs, desires, purposes and capacities to create the experience"* (Dewey 1997, p.44). This is a dynamic and creative process (Dewey 1910). As with the ideas of Freire (1970) and Rogers (1984), Dewey holds that education is not a passive process, but rather, active and experiential, with the individual possessing greater power and control in their learning.

Although the sample did not make any specific reference to Dewey's work on experience and learning there was a strong inference of his ideas**.** Rather than the more formulaic process outlined by Kolb (1984, 2014) the respondents spoke

of the experience more generally and in holistic terms akin to that of Dewey (1997). With all the research participants, there was a clear emphasis on the importance of experience. The richness with which Dewey describes experience in a learning context is reflected in how the respondents discussed these ideas in their practice. However, the disconnection to his theory illustrates a gap in either knowledge or awareness and weakens the potential power of theoretically informed practice.

The respondents recognised their power in the dynamics of their educational endeavour. There was a consistent message in the data that the practitioners saw their job to work toward more equal relationships with young people. Similarly, Dewey (1997, p.38) places a high level of responsibility on the educator to be mature and faithful to their own knowledge and experience. The research participants also drew a distinction between traditional notions of education like those of Dewey (1997). The research participants saw the distinctiveness of youth work in how they created experiences with and for young people. The notion of Freire's (1970) banking concept as a critique of educators who metaphorically 'fill' the empty vessel of the student, was endorsed by the respondents. They saw learning in relational, interactive and student-centred terms similar to ideas of Rogers (1977) and Rogers and Freiberg (1994).

As stated, John Dewey was not explicitly mentioned by any of the respondents, however, his model of experience and learning is evident in what was said. As such, other than that of Kolb, there was little to suggest that the respondents aligned themselves to any particular model of learning through or from experience. The lack of knowledge of Dewey's ideas may indicate ignorance or it demonstrates an osmotic process of understanding akin to the phronesis which

Ord (2016) describes. Youth workers have a frame of reference in Kolb, yet they talked about experience in a way more similar to Dewey. They emphasised the dialogical, the continuity and the interaction rather than holding specifically to a theoretical model.

One respondent referred to how he saw the creation of an experience. He talked of how he helped in ***"allowing them*** (young people***) the space to be young people"*** (focus group 2). This more laissez faire approach is contrary to the intentionality which Kolb (2014) and Jarvis (2012) purport to be the essence of experiential learning. However, the above focus group member acknowledged that young people need experience and space to learn and develop, thus emphasising the environment rather than the activity. This idea, while not explicit, aligns itself more closely to the work of John Dewey. His philosophy holds the view that *"the attitude of childhood is naïve, wondering, experimental (and that the) right methods of education preserve and perfect this attitude and thereby short-circuit for the individual the slow progress of the race, eliminating the waste that comes from inert routine"* (Dewey 1910, p. 156). An overriding focus of the research participants was in creating experiences which allow young people to be young people, thus aligning more closely with the philosophy outlined by Dewey.

Nonetheless, mention of the work of Kolb had a stronger prevalence with both the sample and in the youth work literature (Jeffs and Smith 2005; Young 2006; In Defence of Youth Work 2011; Ord 2016a). Kolb (1984, p. 38) defines learning as *"the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience"*. Although Kolb's model of experiential learning had more prevalence (mentioned by three respondents) than any other single model it was not

articulated in any formal or structured way. While not illustrating any depth of understanding in Kolb, he was the only theorist linked to the notion of experience and learning. According to Kolb the model is predicated on four assumptions about learning (see pages 119ff). Throughout the data the respondents attested that learning is not based on outcomes but is a process of adaptation involving problem solving, decision making and creativity. Their examples of practice were illustrative and showed a commitment to both creativity. This coincides with assumptions Kolb holds about learning. He suggests that learning *"when conceived as a holistic adaptive process, it provides conceptual bridges across life situations such as school and work, portraying learning as a continuous, lifelong process"* (Kolb 1984, p.33). This specific articulation was absent from the dialogue with the participants but there was a clear emphasis on the holistic nature of youth work.

The transformative nature of the learning produced through experience was evident from all the respondents and accords with a second assumption of Kolb. The respondents did not concur with all the complexities and theoretical ideas inherent in Kolb's work. However, there was acknowledgement that youth work was a transformative process which enabled young people to explore their experience and make sense of it.

As stated, three of the research participants highlighted Kolbs model when discussing experiential learning. Though there was little mention of the four stages, they were implicit throughout the discussion on learning through experience. However, a coherent and erudite understanding, the theory's constituent parts or underlying assumptions were not forthcoming. Although one of the respondents could recite Kolb's model it was not expanded upon.

Nevertheless, the respondents, as with Kolb, did not see the experience as enough. The only stage that was elaborated and consistently prioritised was that of review and reflection. The research participants, while not sophisticated in their understanding, contended that learning which takes place in youth work is enhanced when the experience is reviewed or reflected upon.

Reflection on the experience was the only one of the Kolb's four stage model to be explicitly mentioned by any of the respondents. One of the respondents stressed the importance of reviewing the process while another said the experience should be critically analysed and reflected upon in order to understand the learning. While this perspective was dominant, a more integrated model emerged to place relationship, conversation and 'learning through doing' as the bedrock of experiential learning. While this more integrative approach was endorsed, the notion of a participative element to the learning could only be inferred as it was not explicitly mentioned. It seems that experience and learning were viewed quite distinctly from participation. Furthermore, a more casual and non-systematic model of thinking emerged rather than the prescribed model of Kolb. The data indicates that learning should always involve reflection and that the youth worker's role is to facilitate reflective learning spaces for young people.

As with the respondents, according to Elkjaer (2009) and Jarvis (2010) Kolb's model is one of the most cited in the literature. Furthermore, the youth work literature endorses a similar emphasis (Jeffs and Smith 2005; Young 2006; In Defence of Youth Work 2011; Ord 2012). However, the specifics of the model seem to be less understood. Apart from one person, the respondents were not explicit about any of the model's component parts and there was no explicit

mention of Kolb's underlying assumptions. Nonetheless, some interviewees referred to aspects of experiential learning which tie in with other models and theorists (Schön 1983; Boud et al., 1993; Jarvis 2012). While three of the respondents mentioned Kolb as a theoretical basis for their view of experiential learning no other related theorists were mentioned. However, throughout the interviews, respondents spoke of the importance of learning by doing, along with the need to encourage young people to think about and reflect upon their experience. These basic ideas fit within the conceptual framework of experiential learning as expressed by Kolb (1984, 2015). These two aspects of reflection and action were more dominant than other aspects of any theoretical perspectives. While the models were not explicit, there were hidden depths to the interview discourse which implied a deeper knowledge and perception of what practitioners were trying to achieve through the experiential learning opportunities being created.

While Kolb was present in the discourse with the sample, perhaps the broader ideas of Piaget give an overarching framework for understanding the role of experience in youth work. Piaget (1978, p.651) argues that knowledge comes from three sources; the subject, the object or *"from multiple interactions between the subject and the object"*. This emphasis on the relationship between the experience and the individual resonated with the sample. Youth work involves, as one person suggested, real experiences from which to learn. They stated, ***"it's not playing"*** (21FVP). Another posited that the learning takes place in the young person's interaction with their environment, experiences and each other. This interrelationship between the objective and the subjective realities of the young people was evident throughout the discourse on experiential learning.

Nevertheless, implicitly, the sample was drawn to a view of experiential learning which showed a residue of model-like thinking. There was a clear focus upon creating holistic, relationally based, dialogical and experiential learning spaces regardless of whether they were linked to the models of Kolb or others. The overarching view was that creating experiences and activities for young people did not necessarily produce any learning in and of themselves. Rather, the respondents supposed that change is only brought about through challenging, experiential learning opportunities which identify growth and the development of skills through a process of reflection and in an environment, which is marked by positive relationships. The learning brought about in this context was said to be different to the outcomes of formal education. Young people growing in confidence, learning more about themselves and for themselves was the overwhelming emphasis of the research participants. Experiential learning, one respondent said, was much different from 'teaching'. He said, ***"every time you're teaching something you're denying them the experience of learning it themselves"*** (12MVP). This perspective on learning through experience lines up with the conceptual ideas outlined by Boud et al., (1993) and more particularly Dewey (1997). Furthermore, the dominance of the term 'experiential learning' was the most tangible within the sample grouping. While few explicit references to Kolb were evident the dominance of his parlance was striking. Finally, the notions regarding the necessity of reflection align with Schön's (1983) perspective of reflecting in and on action and as part of Jarvis (2012) learning cycle where reflection is the core component.

There was a clear interconnectedness to the other three processes of relationship building, conversation and dialogue and participation within the

single process of experiential learning that demonstrates a level of interdependence; one cannot happen without the other. Moreover, intimated throughout the interviews is a sense that youth work itself can be or is the experience. Of the four processes explored by the research participants, learning through experience was expressed least eruditely. Yet, as a process it is evidently the culmination of the other three processes. This notion of interdependence formed part of the theoretical ideas which are presented in the following section.

Developing Theory

A primary observation from the findings showed the lack of theory discussed by the research participants. While not shocking, this was surprising. Throughout the focus groups and interviews there was little discussion of concepts, theories or philosophies which underpinned either thinking or practice. However, when questioned about the concepts and ideas which informed practice, there were many who talked about personal experience and some who discussed broader political ideas. These drivers were more prevalent than the concepts and theories outlined in the literature review. However, the theoretical views outlined in the literature review also pertain to the underpinning philosophies of the processes which support youth work's purpose. Whether or not the respondents were versed in these ideas may not be important, as their insights alluded to implicit and similar underlying concepts.

As the study has evolved, the researcher has endeavoured to ascertain how practitioners engage with theory and practice. The findings show that theoretical understanding and perspectives, while not often explicit, were evident in both the focus groups and interviews. The research has grappled with theoretical ideas which have been both paramount and prevalent from the inception of the study, yet the priority of theory is not immediately clear from the responses of the research participants. Therefore, the intention of this section is to make sense of how the participants perceive theory, and present various models of how they have explored the processes and the purpose of their work.

Within the study theory has been explored at each phase. The literature review endeavoured to understand how theory relates to the processes which underpin the purpose and practice of youth work. Secondly theoretical ideas and

constructs have formed the basis of the study as it relates to the research methodology. Now, thirdly and perhaps most significantly, developing theory is the analytical response to the findings of the empirical research. Thomas (2017, p.97) suggests that theory involves getting above the findings to *"see shape in them"*. It is this shape that the following section will endeavour to create.

In the earlier stage of this study the literature review presented several theoretical perspectives which underpin the purpose of, and processes inherent within, youth work. The findings have been analysed and contrasted with the theoretical perspectives outlined in the literature review. Subsequently, the analysis of youth work's purpose and the four processes outlined above shows how the respondents perceived their importance and meaning. While a few of the respondents referred to theory, no single theoretical model was explicitly stated. Instead, there were indications of how differing ideas and loose theoretical notions had informed practice. It is these ideas and notions which form the basis for developing a model and extrapolating firmer theoretical frameworks. It is therefore these views on theory which will be analysed and drawn upon to examine what emerges as a new theoretical model.

Theory is defined by Kerlinger (1970, cited Cohen et al., 2011, p.9) as *"a set of interrelated constructs [concepts] definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena".* This notion of theory is quite broad. Although Cohen et al (2011) believe there are 9 characteristics which should be evident for the development of effective empirical theory they will not be included here. Instead, the theory examined here relates more to what Thomas (2017) suggests is the 'thinking side' of practice. He explains this further by stating *"when people talk about their personal theory they mean conjectures, personal thoughts and*

insights that help practitioners make sense of the practical world" (Thomas 2017, p. 98). Examining how the respondents have talked about their ideas of practice and analysing how it measures against other theoretical perspectives is the essence of this section.

The theoretical ideas explored in this section will therefore relate to three aspects of the study. Firstly, this segment will analyse and discuss the implicit and explicit theory which informed the respondents' practice and understanding of the processes used. The second emphasis will draw upon the theory and models which the sample used to illustrate how they saw the processes working together. Thirdly, various models and typology will be presented to illustrate how theory may be extrapolated from the research. This third aspect of theory will help in determining models for understanding the purpose of, and the processes utilised, within youth work. Ultimately, as Cohen et al. (2011) intimate, these models should provide a new explanatory conceptual framework.

Theory and Youth Work Practice

The underlying political assumptions and ideas expressed by some of the respondents showed an ideological motivation for youth work. Engaging young people in the political realm of life and effecting change with them, while only prevalent for four respondents, illustrated that some had a macro scale vision for young people. The theoretical ideas of Crick (2000, 2002) Arnstein (1969) and Dewey (2007) whilst inferred were not explicitly discussed by any of the respondents. Furthermore, while political ideologies were inferred from a few of the research participants there was no mention of a political framework for understanding youth work. Nonetheless, the political drivers and aspirations of the youth work practitioners were evident in a small number of the respondents.

Although political ideas informed the practice of only a few respondents in the focus groups and interviews it was less of a driver than their personal views and perspectives. Broad theoretical notions were evident from all respondents but few cited specific theorists or volunteered explicitly 'grand' ideas. Rather, the theory which people posited was more akin to a common-sense view about social pedagogy which was embedded in their experience. When explicitly asked about what informed their practice several of the respondents simply stated ***"experience".*** The researcher found this an unusual expression given that all the respondents were qualified to at least a diploma level in higher education. With the theory almost absent and no explanation other than a reliance on experience to understand the response, it is necessary to reflect on conceivable justification for this phenomenon. The subsequent section will draw upon reading material which was partially explored in the literature review. This literature will add insight and expression to the phenomenon regarding the participants' missing theoretical reflections.

While there is a surprising absence of theory and an overstating of experience, the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) may explain such a response. They view learning in a practice setting such as youth work to be 'apprenticeship-like' with members of the profession not necessarily learning from theory, but other practitioners. This, they suggest moves beyond 'learning by doing' to the development of a community of practice. As such this community of practice is characterised by *"biographies/ trajectories, relationships and practices"* (Lave and Wenger 1991, p.55). As a community of practice, the sample seems to have embodied youth work as a series of processes and ideas, and while having a theoretical basis, there is a void of explicit references to theory. Consequently,

the respondents spoke of the processes with assumptions which were akin to the theory underpinning them, but with little explicit reference. Examples of this phenomenon were present throughout the findings. While there was little mention of Carl Rogers, his core conditions were evident in the youth workers' parlance. Likewise, Freirean ideas regarding power, equality and dialogue were assumed by most of the practitioners. One respondent said, ***"you are supporting young people to develop their critical thinking skills"*** (2MVC). Without using explicit Freirean terminology, similar language was utilised to articulate the purpose of the process. This seems to have been learnt from somewhere, yet without a reference to theory as expounded in the literature. Youth work as a community of practice is posited as a theoretical explanation to account for the similar expressions and the common language used across the research participants. The link to Lave and Wenger's work on situated learning may help to explain the commonalities across the sample.

Another potential explanation for the sample's gravitation away from theory and towards experience may be due to anti-intellectualism (Seal 2014). Mike Seal suggests that this phenomenon exists among youth workers, and often the cult of the charismatic personality means that theory has little place in youth work practice. While not fully excusing this anti-intellectualism, he has some empathy for Baizerman's perspective who says youth workers are *"too busy working"* (cited Seal 2014, p.21) to develop theory. This excuse may have some merit but a comment from one of the respondents suggests otherwise. He said, ***"theory and models are based on those who can't; watching those who can"*** (13MVC). This anti-intellectual shortcut caricatures something of what Seal (2014) recognises within practitioners. Seal's proposal for change is to create an

alliance between the intellectual and the practitioner advocating for a grounded theory approach whereby experience and the theoretical ideas merge. This response should enable practitioners to become more aware of their theoretical discourse while at the same time, academics would understand the realities of youth workers on the ground. Grounded theory research of this nature could test out if the theory works in a practice setting and help to bring about greater clarity of purpose.

The experience which the respondents emphasised over theory is less surprising when compared to the type of learning which youth work promotes. As stated previously (pages 234ff) Ord (2014, 2016) advocates for the Aristotelian idea of phronesis as a way of understanding youth work. He suggests that phronesis involves making judgements based on wisdom which is appropriate for a specific context. This emphasis is evident across the research participants, who, when asked about theory, emphasised their experience and wisdom over any external or explicit theoretical notion. Phronesis may well be adequate terminology to reduce an emphasis on theory within youth work. However, it may not be sufficient given the array of complex ideas, theory and external context which relates to youth work. There is a need for a more joined up approach to include techne, episteme alongside phronesis.

While there may be legitimate reasons for youth workers' lack of gravitation towards theory, it is nonetheless, an influencer of practice. However, from the data, it seems there is a reluctance to discuss theory or consciously mention it in the discourse. As previously stated, there is a need to communicate youth work's meaning more effectively and with greater clarity. Spence (2007, p.4) suggests that youth workers should have an *"increased attention to theoretically informed*

meaning-making analysing what youth work is". This assertion corresponds with the premise for the study endeavouring to embed a theoretical framework for youth workers to understand and articulate their practice. The modelling of the processes is therefore the next emphasis in this analysis and discussion.

Developing the Processes into a Theoretical Model

In both the focus groups and interviews the respondents were asked about how they perceived the relationship between the four processes. The findings show a second theoretical emphasis which illustrates how the processes connect to each other. The participants attempted to state their preferences and potential models resulting from the four processes. While some of the participants could easily volunteer a model with some analysis and reflection, others were less articulate.

The findings showed that all the respondents mentioned the 4 processes in some form. However, only one respondent articulated 3 of the 4 processes specifically by name and together. Unprompted, he said the ***"key processes are around conversation, and activities that promote positive relationships, and learning through doing"*** (2MVC). Although participation is not mentioned in this extract he later talked about it as a central process. While this response stated three processes, all the respondents mentioned at least two within the early part of the focus groups or interviews. As the interaction with the research participants progressed, all the processes were mentioned in some form. It was significant that the interviewees explicitly volunteered specific processes as they were not discussed in advance of the dialogue. There was a dominant parlance regarding the processes within the data collection phase of the study, but it is difficult to infer much significance from these interactions given the qualitative

nature of the research. The prominence of language regarding the processes does not imply that this is specific to the sector, but its dominance is striking. Furthermore, the perceptions of the inter-relationship and connections between the processes, while not particularly profound, showed a level of developed thinking as the respondents made linkages.

Although the focus groups were formally asked to prioritise the processes through a simple pro forma, the interviewees were not. This was an oversight by the researcher and although not a quantitative study this method would have added to the more qualitative responses of the interviewees. Conversely, it would have been useful to gain more qualitative reflections from the focus groups. Nevertheless, in both sets of data, respondents offered a prioritisation to rank the four processes (see pages 210ff). It is difficult to be conclusive about these findings as a diversity of opinion was evident and the methods varied. However, the insights gained from both the form (focus groups, appendix 8) and discussion (interviewees) were useful in identifying trends. Of the two data collection exercises, due to the quantitative method used, the focus group exercise showed greater clarity in the prioritising of the processes. This was a non-voluntary method as each was pressed to fill out a simple form (appendix 8 and for results see page 210ff) subsequent to the focus group discussion. Conversely, only 13 of the interviewees volunteered to verbally rank or prioritise any of the processes.

The focus group data concentrated on either relationship building or conversation as a first or second priority. Initially, this data looks like a typical response to the question with participation and learning through experience shown as lesser priorities. The emphasis on relationship building and

conversation would have been a caricatured assumption of the researcher prior to the study. The basic responses of the focus group did not reveal any explanation and while useful in gauging a sense of priority, the interviews showed much greater depth of insight. Although only 13 of the 24 interviewees could prioritise the processes in an order it produced deeper reflection than the simple pro-forma used within the focus groups. When discussing the priority of the processes with the interviewees this qualitative approach showed more profound understanding.

The visualisations depicted by the respondents (page 313ff) illustrated a metaphorical view of the processes. This imagery varied but showed that relationship building is a priority in youth work. This has also been well documented in the youth work literature (Blacker 2010; Sapin 2013; Davies 2015; Jeffs 2011). The models which the interviewees used to explicate their understanding of how the processes interrelated showed a similar emphasis. This apparently unifying evidence shows congruence and consistency, but complementary evidence showed a more complex level of thinking.

Upon deeper investigation of the data, while the respondents seemed to suggest that relationship was at the core, there was a stronger reliance upon conversation. One interviewee emphasised conversation over the other processes. He said, ***"if you don't have conversation you don't have anywhere to go"*** (18FSP). Although relationship building was stated as a greater priority by most others this comment is indicative of other data collected in the interviews. The draw to state relationship building as a priority is not backed up with the respondent's previous statements. Through the discourse the frequency of the terms conversation and dialogue were greater than relationship

building even though it was stated as a greater priority. The language used showed greater passion and zeal. This is evident in the following statements ***"I think that to do dialogue for me is such a key component, it's the cog for turning everything else"*** (Focus group 2). An interviewee also prioritised conversation, he said that ***"conversation is more the purpose of youth work… the conversation is the reason why we're establishing that relationship"*** (22MSP) while another stated ***"it's a vital cog in building relationships"*** (5MVC). It is inexplicable why this emphasis on conversation does not translate to a more definite priority when respondents were asked about prioritising the processes or creating a model.

The model which most of the respondents settled upon puts relationship building at the centre with the other processes interlocking (Fig 10.1). This view prioritises relationship building as a process and sees it as the pivotal point of engagement with young people. In this model, relationship building is therefore deemed central to all the other processes.

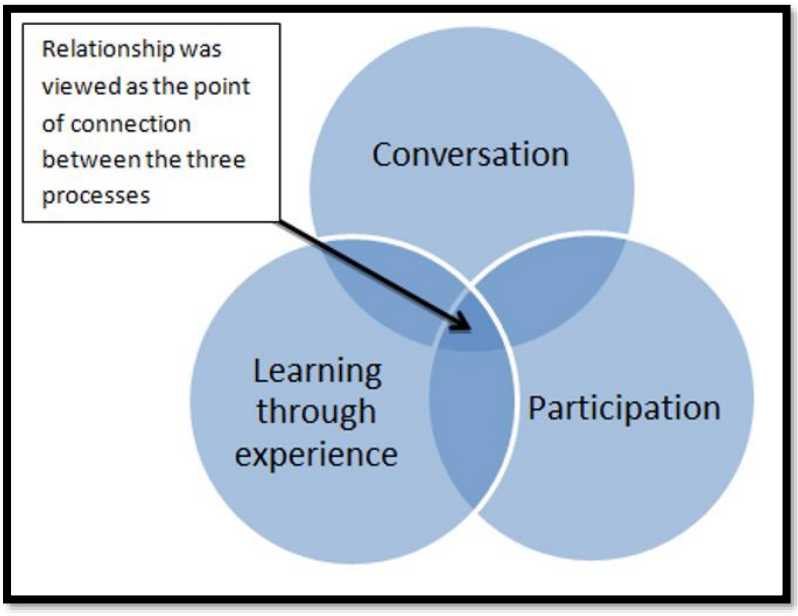

Fig 10.1 Relationship as the connecting point of the other three processes

However, upon deeper analysis a new model (Fig 10.2) emerged from the data and the findings. While not revolutionary this model appears to contradict the common-sense view which the respondents explicitly articulated. Rather than placing relationship building as the core process the data indicates a greater priority and centrality of conversation. Moreover, an alternative model could equality be presented from the findings.

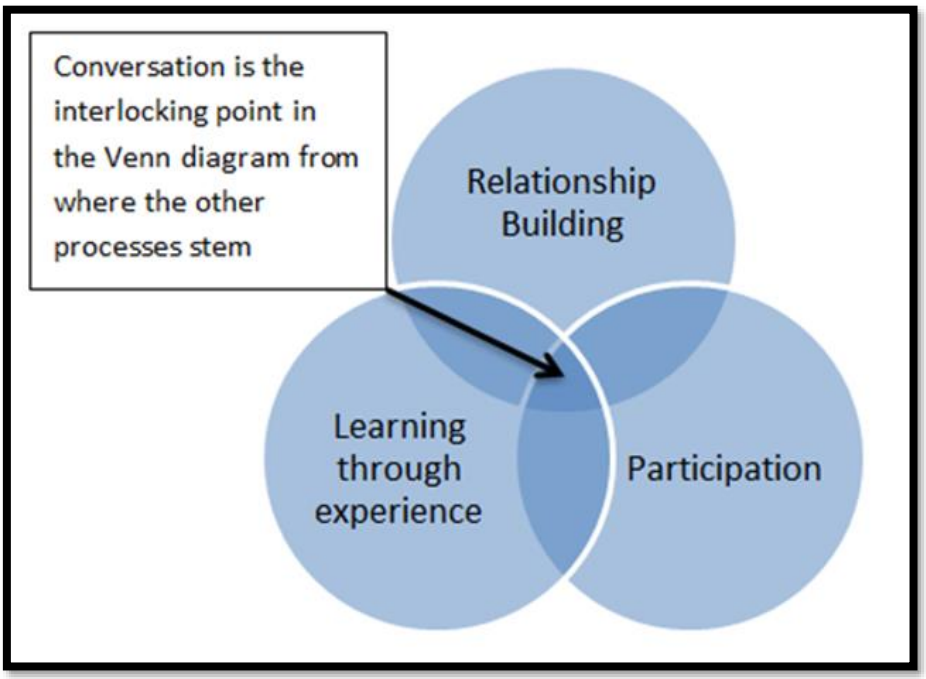

Fig 10.2 Conversation where the other processes meet

This model (Fig 10.3) is a pyramid with conversation at the bottom leading to relationship building, leading to participation, and then to learning through experience. Conversation in this illustration is the foundational basis for the other three processes.

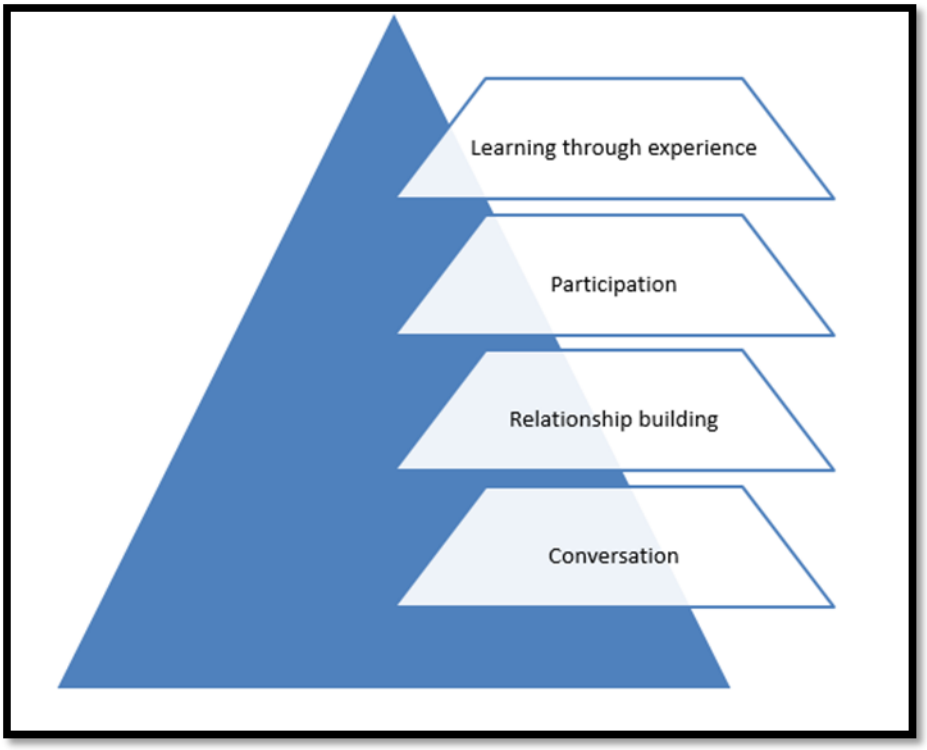

Fig 10.3 The processes as a pyramid

The evidence from the research participants places much greater emphasis on conversation than the other processes but the written epistemology concurs. Building the processes both around or upon conversation and dialogue links to the concept of learning which Freire (1970) purports. Within the Freirean tradition dialogue has a two-fold emphasis. Firstly, it aims to produce a greater critical awareness of the 'undesirable ways' in which the participants are affected by their circumstances or culture (Cooper et al., 2013, p.79). Freire (2007, p.40) refers to this process as the development of critical consciousness whereby, *"critical understanding leads to critical action"*. Secondly, Freire's concept of dialogue emphasises the valued contribution of both the educator and the participant as equal partners in the learning process. This participatory approach, as with Buber (1947, 1970) and Bakhtin (1981, 1984), esteems both parties and is intended to create a much less hierarchical learning environment. This intent

was evident with most of the research participants. Their desire to engage young people in purposeful, two-way, and action orientated conversation was evident as they discussed their practice and the 'meaning making' (Spence 2007) experiences with young people.

The dialogue and conversation emphasised in the data challenges the common-sense view that relationship building is the central process. Furthermore, the centrality of a Freirean approach indicates gravitation away from predetermined learning outcomes and towards those which are mutually determined. The research shows that this partnership concurs with Freire (1970). He suggests it produces co-learning between the learner and the educator, whereby they work out the learning together. This discourse on learning highlights the need for clarity about the type of learning which is produced in the youth work context. While the ideas and notions throughout this thesis show an eclectic embracing of theory, the educational ideas of Jürgen Habermas, as stated previously (pages 132ff), offer an alternative perspective on learning.

Habermas (1972) sees learning as three modes of inquiry with distinct interests; the technical, practical (or communicative) and emancipatory. According to Rogers (1996) these can be expressed hierarchically with the emancipatory cognitive interest at the pinnacle. Habermas views the three modes of inquiry as necessary for learning but distinguishes between each (Habermas 1972). The technical mode, also known as the instrumental, relates to the cause and effect aspect of learning. This refers to the acquisition of skills and *"understanding what is needed to control the world"* (Rogers 1996, p.15). This type of instrumental learning was cynically referred to as the quest for outcomes and qualifications

which the respondents viewed as a consequence of the youth work policy, Priorities for Youth (DE 2013).

The second mode of inquiry emphasises the practical dimension of learning which develops communicative knowledge. This mode recognises the subjective nature of learning (Habermas 1972) and increases interpersonal understanding (Rogers 1996). This practical mode is also aligned with the views of the respondents as they strongly emphasised building skills and working consensually with young people. The emphasis on conversation is linked to this kind of learning. Thirdly, the emancipatory interest emphasises self-reflection (Habermas 1972). Rogers (1996, p.15) concludes that emancipatory learning increases *"awareness and transformation of personal presuppositions"*. It is further suggested that the empowerment and emancipation produced increases the individuals' communicative capacity (Lovat 2013).

The two-way participative learning advocated by the respondents fits well with an overview of Habermas' ideas. As such Habermas (2008) calls for reciprocal learning processes involving participation, dialogue and consensus. His influence is not so evident in the youth work literature but the application of his philosophy and thinking to youth work gives a framework for utilising the processes outlined. Moreover, the connection with youth work is evident as Habermas is viewed to *"deal with the intellectual, social, emotional, moral and spiritual good"* (Lovat 2013, p.82). These aspirations form a natural alliance with the informal educational processes of relationship building, conversation and dialogue, participation and experiential learning.

Although there is no specific reference to Habermas in the data these ideas outlined above bring together and elucidate what is presented in the data. Namely, the youth workers are working on all three types of learning. Instrumental learning was emphasised by those working towards qualifications and accreditation. The respondents emphasising skills show a more practical bias to their learning. However, the dominance of choice, freedom, self-awareness and critical dialogue type language, shows the strongest bias towards Habermas' notion of emancipation. Clearly the policy framework seeks outcomes which are tangible, yet the sample showed a bias towards the intangible outcome of emancipation.

Summary of Analysis and Discussion

The sections above show a diversity of perspective and analysis regarding the purpose, processes, and theory relating to youth work. In the first instance it was evident that youth work does not have a clear purpose. There was consensus that the lack of clarity resides in two broad explanations. First, youth work's diversity makes it difficult to understand. Second, and more strikingly, the communication of its purpose is weak. While not borne out by all the research participants, it was evident that clarity of purpose in youth work needs to be addressed on a macro level rather than solely by the individual youth worker. This adds a more complex perspective to the assertion that youth workers are *'woolly minded'* (Ingram and Harris 2001, p.17) and suggests the reason for such a claim is wider than the individual youth worker.

While there was perception that youth work lacked clarity, the research participants expressed several defining characteristics that were broadly aligned to aspects of the literature. Concepts such as democracy, choice and voluntary engagement, along with the importance of being young person centred, were central to their understanding. However, rather than rally around a few specific concepts and principles, there was a greater emphasis on what youth work is not, more than what it is. This juxtaposing was a dominant feature across the data but particularly as it related to the defining characteristics, namely youth work is not formal education and youth workers are not 'school teachers'.

Stemming from the defining characteristics of youth work, the definition and purpose clearly showed gravitation towards youth work as an educational process. While not completely clear about the definition of youth work, the research participants emphasised language which has common parlance in the

Northern Ireland youth work curriculum (Department of Education 2003). This centred on the term personal and social development. While coherent, the term did not sufficiently address the nature or purpose of youth work. This lack of intentionality was less noticeable when the participants discussed the processes by which they engage young people.

The respondents discussed the processes of relationship building, conversation, participation and learning through experience with relative ease. This showed a heightened understanding of the purpose of their work. Initially, there was a primary focus on relationship building and an emphasis on the person-centred approach. However, conversation was deemed more crucial, with learning through experience and participation being less prominent. This focus on dialogue and conversation showed a Freirean theoretical bias in the data. This dialogical youth work process emphasised power sharing, democracy and participation. While the other processes had merit with the respondents, there is no doubting that the purpose of youth work hinged on the quality and process of conversation and dialogue.

Finally, the theoretical ideas presented by the participants were analysed and discussed. As the data showed, theory was not foremost in the responses of the research participants and three reasons were proposed regarding this phenomenon. The potential models presented by the participants showed a limited depth of insight, but in exploring beyond the façade, this showed a primacy of conversation and dialogue across their practice. This emphasis on conversation and dialogue drew the participants to an educational paradigm where power sharing is central and the learning, emancipatory. The Habermasian ideas, while not explicitly mentioned by the respondents, have

been proposed by the researcher as a way of thinking about learning achieved through youth work.

Throughout the study the defining features, analysis and discussion of youth work processes and emerging theoretical constructs were evident. While the research participants showed some clarity, there were times when they showed a vague understanding of the purpose and processes of youth work. This eclectic mix of responses, while not statistically reliable, illustrates a range of issues which have implications for further research, policy makers, youth work training and practitioners. These implications will be discussed in the final chapter.

Chapter Eleven: Implication of the Study and Personal Reflections

The objective of this chapter is to discuss the issues raised throughout the study and outline the implications. The research study is a qualitative investigation into the perspectives and understanding of youth workers about the purpose and processes utilised in practice. As such, the generalisability of the findings and the subsequent analysis and discussion should not be overstated. Nonetheless, to shy away from the broad thrust of the investigation would be equally imprudent. Whilst not based on its reliability and validity, qualitative research of this nature can be defended because of its credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Kumar 2014). The essence is on translating the integrity of the research into something which may be useful for the sector, youth work practitioners and students. Therefore, this part of the study attempts to delineate the ‘so what?’ of the research.

The chapter is structured in a straightforward manner. Four broad messages arising from the research will be discussed and then followed by implications. These implications relate to four spheres: youth work policy and sector; youth work practitioners; research; and youth work training. This section serves to draw the study together with personal reflections and analysis. The implications were derived from a desire to look beyond the study and outline its relevance. Inherent within these implications are recommendations and an understanding of the weaknesses of the study. As such, there is no intention to be trite or glib but rather, reflective, thoughtful and measured as the issues are examined in turn.

1. Youth Work: Clarity of Purpose or Identity Crisis

From the research, it is difficult to ascertain if youth work has an identity crisis. However, almost two thirds of the respondents stated youth work has an issue with its clarity of purpose and definition. Furthermore, the evidence in this study certainly indicates that not all the respondents were clear in their understanding about the purpose of, and processes utilised in youth work. While over half the respondents showed clarity on many issues, themes and processes, there were difficulties for some in articulating their purpose and practice with eloquence. Defining differing aspects of youth work did not come easily to some of the participants and where there was agreement, the depth was not always evident. In the study, youth workers were quick to define youth work in negative terms by defining it by what it is not, rather than by what it is. This negative construct is difficult to fully understand but points to a lack of confidence in identity and uncertainty about definition and purpose.

Although working from a premise that youth work lacks clarity, the researcher thought that the participants may have had a more definite understanding and ability to articulate youth work more clearly. This was a primary driver for the study with critics stating, prior to the study, that youth workers do not know what they are doing and cannot explain themselves. Nonetheless, rather than blaming youth workers for this potential identity crisis a number of reasons were posited that have implications for youth work.

One focus group member talked of youth work being clear ‘from within’ but it is not clear ‘from without’. However, others suggested that youth work could be clearer about itself in both the internal and external realms. As indicated, the two-fold reasons posed to explain the phenomenon relate to the breadth of practice

described as youth work and youth work's inability to communicate its message effectively. In turn, responding to these factors may assist in forming a clearer identity.

Implications 1

There are several implications in dealing with the clarity of purpose and responding to the posited ideas of youth work's breadth and how it is communicated. There are implications for policy, practitioners and training presented below.

Implication for Youth Policy and Sector

Currently there is no clear definition or statement of purpose existing within the present or previous policy statements relating to NI youth work. The policy document, Priorities for Youth (Department of Education 2013) alludes to some values and characteristics such as the voluntary principle, non-formal education and complementing formal educational outcomes. However, a more definitive statement on purpose would add greater clarity to the youth work field and help in communicating its value to the outside world.

Implications for Youth Work Practitioners

There is a need for youth workers to further engage in dialogue about the purpose of youth work in various forums and conferences. These would help to support conversations across the profession and the continued professional development of youth workers. The identity of youth workers would be affirmed and critically explored in such environments. Opportunities could also be afforded to communicate youth work across disciplines. This would add richness and increase understanding for each community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991).

Implications for Training

The training of youth workers should support the development of critical thinking about purpose and practice. Developing the ability of youth workers to articulate the purpose of youth work would help form a stronger community of practice. Presenting a pedagogy for youth work in terms of the research would offer a clear framework for understanding. In turn, this would enable youth workers to defend their profession, communicate more effectively and become more certain of their identity.

2. Questioning the Norm

Several constructs and ideas were questioned by both the researcher and participants prior to, and throughout the study. There were four main areas where the perception, norm or myth was explored, challenged or refuted. Many of the respondents were not clear about either the purpose of, or the processes involved in, youth work. The perception of the researcher, that youth workers could articulate their purpose, was therefore not fully realised. Nonetheless, other more fundamental ideas were deeply contested. The concept of the voluntary principle while perceived as fundamental by Davies (2005) and Jeffs and Smith (2010) was not viewed so paramount by the research participants. While most espoused the concept as articulated by these writers, many held a more nuanced view similar to that of Ord (2009). This represents a shift in thinking or is a result of a broader youth work practice, influenced by pragmatism and outcomes, which lends itself less easily to the voluntary principle.

Prior to the study the researcher had anecdotal evidence that youth work was “all about the relationship”. While this idea had prevalence across the sample no one identified relationships as the purpose of youth work. There was a strong alliance to the process of building relationships and it was perceived as central, however

participants used more significant language about the process of conversation and dialogue. While all saw the need for relationship building it was recognised that the power of youth work lay in the outcome of the conversation and dialogue with young people, not an esoteric vision of relationships with young people.

The place and priority of ‘participation’ was another idea which was contested by the participants. While no one doubted its importance within youth work, few had a sophisticated understanding of the process and there was an overreliance on the ‘Model for Effective Practice’ for definition (Department of Education 2003). Moreover, there was a dominant thought that the process was merely tokenistic and lacked authenticity within youth work practice. This finding shows a distancing from a notion which has dominated the youth work parlance in Northern Ireland for over 30 years. With a growing focus on outcomes and a youth sector that is becoming more instrumental in its policy and practice, participation and youth led programmes with young people are less of a possibility or priority.

While it was disappointing that youth workers were less articulate than perceived prior to the study, the other findings were more surprising. Relationship building, while still viewed central to youth work was not perceived as the purpose of youth work. The voluntary principle is thought of as a distinctive characteristic of youth work (Davies 2005; Jeffs and Smith 2010; Ord 2016a) yet was not viewed to be so paramount. Likewise, participation is a central aspect to the youth work curriculum and has a strong body of thinking and philosophy behind it (Arnstein 1969; Dewey 2007; McCready 2011; McCready and Dilworth 2014; Ord 2016a). Yet, as a process, it was viewed as somewhat tokenistic. Finally, based upon the findings, it appears that the current policy emphasis on outcomes lessens the

priority for relationship building and participation within the sector. Ergo, predetermined outcomes militate against relationally based outcomes which promote young people taking control.

Implications 2

In this section there are several points about perspectives on youth work which were previously thought to be the norm but are now deemed questionable. This necessitates further recommendation for action. As such the following implications are outlined to address the issues raised.

Implication for Youth Policy and Sector

The place of participation has been enshrined in the curriculum (Department of Education 2003) and a commitment to the voluntary principle is implicit in the policy, Priorities for Youth (Department of Education 2013). However, there is an uncertainty and ambivalence about their place in practice. As such, it would be important to ascertain the priority for these two concepts at a policy level. Secondly, it would be useful to investigate if the current emphasis on outcomes militates against the traditional emphasis on relationship building and participation.

Implications for Youth Work Practitioners

Youth workers should discuss the priority of these principles and concepts in their work. The priority of relationship building, and participation have been paramount in the youth work parlance and literature yet there seems to be a demise in their importance at practitioner level. Increasing opportunities for youth workers to share, practice and discuss these issues would help in maintaining the priority for participative practice based upon strong relationships. Furthermore, practitioners need to ascertain the relevance of these processes and principles in a changing policy and practice framework. Finally, practitioners

need to develop new models and ways of thinking about and practising participation in their contexts if young people are to be the agents of change and to be fully active citizens (Crick 2000).

Implications for Research

Across all the issues raised from this study there is an implication that further research is required. There is a need to evaluate the impact of policy which focuses upon predetermined outcomes in a profession with a primary focus on participatively determining outcomes in conjunction with young people. Another question raised by this research asks whether participation is still a relevant process to youth work practice.

Implications for Training

Youth work training should consider the changing policy and practice context. This would necessitate the presentation of appropriate theoretical and practice models for enhancing practice and promoting the process of participation. Active citizenship, participative democracy and ownership should be encouraged in all aspects of teaching and training.

3. Theory and Practice in Youth Work

While some explicit reference to theory was evident across the research, specific mention of theoretical models or philosophical perspectives was weak. Given the emphasis on theory within the third level qualification framework it seems that there is a disconnect between what is taught, and the theoretical ideas expressed explicitly by practitioners. This finding was prevalent throughout the study and was evident as participants discussed how they perceived the purpose and also in how they talked of the four processes.

The lack of theoretical references, models or philosophy to underpin the participants' reflections was striking given the fact that all the respondents were qualified to a higher educational level. A search for explication of this phenomenon would be useful. While conjecture, the researcher posited that three factors are inherent within youth work that bring about this phenomenon. Firstly, rather than taking knowledge from a theoretical base, youth workers seem to learn from each other in a 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger 1991). Second, there is an assumption of anti-intellectualism within the field (Seal 2014) which leads to a lack of theoretical and philosophical rigour. The third explanation rests with the idea that youth work is rooted in phronesis, which brings together judgement, wisdom and experience (Ord 2016). As such, youth workers may feel they have little need to draw upon theory when the practice is so experiential.

Implications 3

As with the previous areas discussed, the implications of theory and practice are wide ranging. However, unlike the previous sections there are clear recommendations and implications for all four aspects of policy/sector; practitioner; research and training. Theory and practice inform each other but the lack of theoretical reference in the data indicates a potential weakness which needs to be addressed.

Implication for Youth Policy and Sector

There is too little evidence of theoretical and philosophical understanding within the curriculum or policy framework. As with the definition of youth work, a set of principles, values and theoretical assumptions would support the policy structure and give direction. These should pertain to principles such as those underpinning the four processes outlined in this study. An emphasis on co-learning, equality,

dialogue and conversation, participative democracy, experiential learning and building life changing relationships with young people would demonstrate the type of youth work desired. These pedagogical concepts and principles should underpin the policy framework to give substance and rigour to the theoretically light documents.

Implications for Youth Work Practitioners

Youth workers should know about what informs their work and be able to defend the practice in which they engage. Two aspects of defence are necessary. The evidence base for youth work would become clearer if workers could articulate their practice more clearly. Secondly, the rationale for utilising the processes outlined would help to express the purpose of youth work more eloquently and eliminate the accusation of being woolly minded (Ingram and Harris 2001). Building a stronger theoretical base for youth work would also assist practitioners in supporting other youth workers to think critically about expanding their theoretical base. In only teaching ‘what we know’ (Tierney 2011) the theory and practice linkages are limited. Practitioners need to access opportunities for continued professional development for the enhancement of their theoretical knowledge base.

Implications for Research

A larger scale study should be undertaken to test out if this qualitative research represents the sector. This would necessitate a statistically reliable quantitative research methodology which would investigate practitioners’ understanding of theory and its place in their work. The research would help to ascertain if the lack of connection between theory and practice is an issue of concern and how it should be addressed. A related yet supplementary point of interest should be to

investigate the reasons for the apparent lack of theoretical vocabulary and thinking.

Implications for Training

Youth work training and teaching of the theoretical perspectives would give practitioners a basis for their practice, involving the formation of a rationale for working with young people in different ways to other professionals. Emphasis should be placed upon pedagogical and theoretical models of working with young people. From experience of both the research data and teaching in the university there is an absence of coherent and tangible theory that translates to the work place. Efforts should be made to devise agreed theoretical models for working with young people. This would enable the future work force to articulate a clearer rationale and theoretical framework for their practice.

4. Emergent Theoretical Models for Youth Work

While there was little evidence of the respondents discussing objective theoretical models, there was a willingness to theorise. Each research participant articulated how they prioritised the processes and how they thought they were interlinked. After analysis of what was said by each participant a model emerged which placed conversation as the central or foundational process amongst the four. The metaphor of conversation being the vital cog within the youth work processes is illustrated below (Fig 11.1).

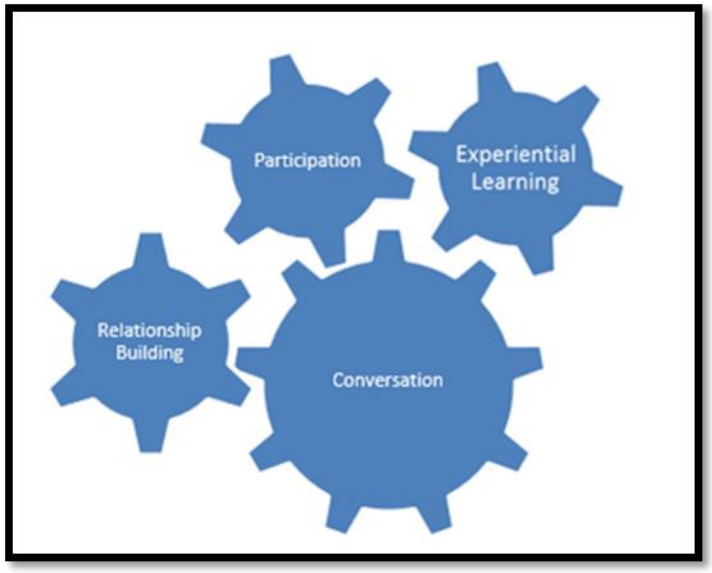

Fig 11.1 Conversation as the cog which drives the other three processes

A model which places conversation as the central cog of all the youth work processes is different from that which was assumed at the outset of the research. Placing greater importance on this process illustrates a shift away from the researcher's perception of the centrality of relationships and relationship building. This emphasis points to an overarching purpose of youth work that is to create a critical consciousness within young people. Dialogue and conversation emphasises the two-way relationship and the strive for equality. In such a model, young people are able to articulate their needs and find the freedom to learn for themselves (Rogers and Freiberg 1994). It is through this dialogical experience that learners come together to encounter each other in an authentic way.

Furthermore, it became evident through the study that Jürgen Habermas offers an alternative model or way of viewing youth work. Through such a theoretical lens youth work can be considered as various types of learning; instrumental; practical and emancipatory. The use of Habermas' theory of knowledge and human interests accords with Aber (1991) in that it can be utilised to analyse all human behaviour.

Implications 4

While this apparent gap between theory and practice was not an intentional outcome of the study it became prominent as the research developed. Connecting theory and practice assists youth workers to understand and demonstrate a theoretical base for their work. This would lead to a more robust way of thinking about youth work practice and enable critical discussion about its purpose at different levels by providing a shared vocabulary and enriched conceptualisation.

Implications for Policy and Sector

The sector, as stated previously, shows little public evidence of embracing theoretical constructs or ideas as they relate to youth work. Presenting the models outlined (see pages 269ff) would enable a discourse about the type of learning upon which youth work is focussed and assist in informing policy. Opportunities should be sought to discuss the findings of this study at policy level and propose the models as an option for practice.

Implications for Youth Work Practitioners

Given the lack of theoretical models and philosophical perspectives articulated by the practitioners it would be useful to promote the theoretical outcomes of this study to youth workers. These two models should be rolled out to the sector through conferences and other forums. Youth work practitioners should discuss the models and explore the viability of operationalising them in practice.

Implications for Research

There are three clear implications for future research. Firstly, research is needed into the validity and viabilities of operationalising the two models outlined. This could be realised through quantitative research which would explore how youth workers perceive the place of theory and the relevance of these models in their

work. Finally, a grounded theory approach could be utilised through the engagement of youth workers, testing out the viability of the theoretical ideas within their practice settings. This approach would hone the theoretical models and help to operationalise them within practice.

Implications for Youth Work Training

The two theoretical models should be integrated within current youth work training at higher education to enable critical reflection and deeper theoretical discussion. This would increase theoretical discourse and provide a forum for the discussion of youth work's purpose and the processes by which it engages young people. The university context would allow for discourse of the theoretical models found in the research and continue with their development.

Proposed Programme for Action

The implications outlined above illustrate four areas where action is required to advance the findings of this study. The following proposed programme for action involves the areas of policy, practitioners, further research and youth work training.

Engage with **Policy Makers** and funders such as Education Authority and Department of Education Officials to discuss the findings and implications outlined. There are four main areas for discussion.

1. The community youth work team should lobby for a definition of youth work at policy level within the next 3 years.
2. The researcher will discuss the pedagogical and theoretical basis of youth work with senior Education Authority workers within 1 year of publication. In this dialogue attempts would be made to endorse the centrality of conversation within youth work practice.

3. The researcher should discuss with policy makers, how they can support a reinvigoration of core youth work principles and processes (ongoing).

Opportunities should be created for youth **Work Practitioners** to engage in debate, discussion and action regarding the implications of this study. There are three proposed actions for this recommendation.

1. A biennial conference should be created to discuss the fundamentals and theoretical basis of youth work. This could be organised by the community youth work team at Ulster University January 2020.
2. The researcher should engage with sector forums (e.g. Regional Voluntary Youth Organisations and Youth Work Alliance) to present key findings and assertions made by the study. Discussion should begin by September 2018.
3. Tools like Critical Voice NI, practice and academic journals should be utilised by practitioners to foster debate and discussion of key youth work principles, practice and pedagogical issues (ongoing).

The proposed action for further **Research** are implicit throughout the study. The 3 points of action outlined below give an indication of the type and scope of research required. Possibilities for research will be investigated by the researcher within one year of this study being published

1. Quantitative research is proposed to ascertain the reliability, validity and generalisability of the study.
2. The impact of a renewed focus on outcomes should be ascertained through evaluative research.
3. A larger mixed method piece of research would help to ascertain whether youth work has lost its key characteristics, theoretical or pedagogical basis.

The study clearly illustrates implications for **Youth Work Training** in higher education. The following three action points should address these implications.

1. The training of youth workers should have a clear theoretical and pedagogical basis. This has been actioned by the community youth work team in the current revalidation of the new course.
2. A module will be developed to enhance a deeper understanding of youth work's purpose and processes. This has been written and integrated within the newly revalidated community youth work degree commencing September 2018.
3. Students should have regular opportunities to engage with youth work policy makers and funders to understand the current political context. This is proposed for 4 modules in the new revalidated community youth work degree to be taught from September 2018

While this programme of action is not exhaustive, it forms the basis for future tasks emanating from the study.

Critical Review of the Study

The study attempts to understand an epistemology of youth work from the perspective of the literature and youth workers. Throughout there has been an attempt at rigour, reflection, analysis, critique and application with a focus on scholarship (Boyer 1990). With a study of this scope it is open to criticism on several levels. Consequently, the author has critically reviewed the study and examined some of its strengths and limitations.

While it is important to note that the breadth of the study was useful in setting out an epistemology of youth work there were some drawbacks to this approach. The breadth enabled a wide focus for the study, showing multiple dimensions to youth work. However, any one aspect of the study could have produced a PhD. The purpose, or each of the four processes, or the theory could have been examined with greater depth if studied singularly. Nonetheless, this is mitigated by the range of topics and aspects of youth work covered.

There is a justification given for the qualitative nature of this research and why appropriate methods were used. This was made clear within the methodology chapter. Qualitative research can understand the nature of a phenomenon while quantitative is more *"appropriate in determining the extent of a problem"* (Kumar 2011, p.12). However, quantitative and qualitative research methods are not opposites (Thomas 2017) and as such, a mixed methods approach may have helped with the reliability and generalisability of the study. Understanding the phenomenon of youth work and examining its epistemology enabled an exploration of its nature but testing this with a wider audience would have added another dimension to the study.

The study utilised a broadly interpretivist paradigm alongside constructionist and phenomenological insights. This offered a robust qualitative framework enabling depth and rigour in analysis. However, social theory would have offered another lens from which to view the research. Whether Bourdieu and 'Habitus', Foucault and 'power' or Putnam's work on social capital, a macro lens from which to view the concepts may have had added another layer to the work. Nonetheless, with the rich array of theory discussed in the review of literature this may have introduced a complexity which would have been difficult to operationalise.

While these three reflections represent broad ideas and criticisms the list is not exhaustive. However, on balance the thesis has endeavoured to show how youth workers understand youth work and the processes by which it engages young people. Moreover, there has been an attempt, throughout, to do justice to the research, show integrity to the literature and honour the methodological process.

Contribution to Knowledge

The four key messages and accompanying implications previously outlined give an indication of the contribution to knowledge made by this study. However, making these explicit is the focus here. Oliver (2014) suggests that a PhD thesis should show evidence of freshly developed knowledge and demonstrate how it has been innovative or unique in some way. This thesis has contributed to knowledge in both ways and will be evidenced in the following points.

There are eight areas where the study contributes to knowledge.

1. This study is unique due to its focus and construction. Understanding the purpose of youth work as it relates to the processes by which it engages young people is a distinct focus of the study. Bringing these four processes together under one study endeavours to go beyond the rhetoric of simple statements and definitions of purpose and show a complexity unexpressed elsewhere. This is an innovative way of exploring the purpose of youth work.
2. While there were hunches and anecdotal evidence prior to this research, the study shows support or refutation of various assumptions. Firstly, prior to the study, the researcher perceived that youth work had an issue with its clarity of purpose. The research affirms this supposition and creates an evidence base from which to build greater clarity. Secondly, normative views on youth work were contested in the research. The shift in policy and practice towards outcomes seems to be the most articulated cause. Assumptions about the voluntary principle, the centrality of relationship and the place of participation have less priority than were previously perceived. Finally, the lack of theoretical parlance in how youth workers discussed their practice was a new

discovery. The perception that youth workers would articulate their practice with some theoretical rhetoric was mostly refuted in the data.

3. The methodological approach was original and previously unattested in Northern Ireland. The researcher systematically examined and explored the views of youth workers. Qualitative research of this nature gave voice to the concerns, perspectives and knowledge of youth work practitioners which would not have been unearthed through a quantitative methodology. Utilising NVivo within a social science framework to collate and analyse the data added scientific rigour and robustness to the study. Few studies have utilised a systematic approach of this nature in the Northern Ireland youth work research field.
4. The compilation of a written epistemology for youth work presents a unique slant on youth work processes. Additionally, the analysis of youth work's purpose through the lens of Jurgen Habermas is distinctive. These two theoretical outcomes have helped in creating a pedagogy of youth work which will assist in the training of youth workers.
5. Conducting empirical research of this nature has, for the first time, systematically unearthed new understanding and perceptions from practitioners on how they view the processes working together. This has elucidated the purpose more clearly than general statements of definition. This is a unique contribution to knowledge.
6. Aspects of the research have already been presented in four forums to develop thinking and practice across the sector. Two workshops were undertaken with Education Authority workers, one with senior staff at the YMCA and the researcher also presented the theoretical models to a group of

Peace iv funded practitioners. New knowledge was an explicitly stated outcome within the evaluations of each workshop and seminar.

7. The creation of a new model with conversation at the centre rather than relationship building is a fresh insight which counters a common-sense view of youth work. This offers a new alternative tool for practitioners to understand their practice.
8. A final significant contribution to knowledge relates to the eclectic theoretical base of the four youth work processes. While these processes have deep theoretical underpinnings, this research shows how these processes are unified through their participative, experiential, dialogical and relational emphases. The research shows that these processes are perceived to produce greater equality between youth worker and young person, lead to emancipation, create ownership and attempt to bring transformative change of self and society. This creates and affirms a new paradigm for the youth work field.

Concluding Reflections

While clarity of purpose was an issue it was perceived that youth work is an educational practice with the pedagogy implicit within the processes by which it engages young people. The youth workers engaged in this study placed high importance on the relationship building process and the relationships they have with young people. There was clarity that the relationship was not the purpose of youth work but enhanced its educative purpose. It was viewed that the person-centred focus of such a process adds to the potency of the learning experience (Rogers 1967) in which the young people engage. Conversation and dialogue were viewed similarly. The process of engaging young people at their point of need was the focus. In conversation, the aim is to create dialogue which is free

from constraint (Habermas 1987), and to create a critical consciousness that is characterised by a co-learning relationship (Freire 1970). The respondents stressed the significance of conversation and this emerged as the cog which drives the other processes.

The process of participation, while viewed as important, seemed to be least relevant for most of the respondents. Whilst committed to the process, there was a palpable annoyance expressed by many that it was usually tokenistic with real power for young people elusive. The fourth process of experiential learning was perceived as the culmination of the other processes, but it was posited that the learning could only be realised through a process of deep reflection. Experiential learning was thought to be a key process where the youth worker is a facilitator (Rogers 1977) and not a 'teacher'. As one respondent stated, ***"every time you're teaching something you're denying them the experience of learning it themselves"*** (12MVP).

Theory was not articulated as strongly as expected. All the practitioners were qualified to, at least, Diploma of Higher Education, with most participants possessing Degrees or Masters qualifications. It was therefore surprising that for many the axiomatic base for practice was their own experience rather than theory. Whilst the practitioners interviewed had a rationale for what they did and understood the processes used, there were few references to theory or philosophical notions. While explanations were postulated for this apparent lack of explicit theory it was surprising that the parlance of youth work was not supported by a reasoned, articulate, evidence and theoretically based rationale for practice.

Finally, this paramountcy of conversation was evident, not in what was initially stated, but by analysis of how the participants talked about the quality of conversation as it related to the other three processes. This places conversation at the centre (Fig 10:2, 11:1) or base (10.3) of the purpose of youth work. It seems, youth work is a dialogical act whereby the learning is focussed on the agency of the young person which the processes produce. As such, the power to learn is placed with the young person. They are not passive recipients or consumers but rather, active agents and citizens who determine, with the youth worker, what and how they need to learn. Sercombe (2010) argues that this agency produces outcomes for the individual and society. Individual agency aligns with such terms as *"individuation, independence, liberty, self-determination, self-actualisation (… and) achieving full potential"* (Ibid., p.23). He further suggests that youth work is also about developing agency in young people which enables them to act into their social contexts. Thus, this affects change in their relationships and communities.

When youth workers work with young people in a shared way the learning that takes place is based on consensus, not domination. As Freire (1970, p.71) states,

> *"at the point of encounter there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages: there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know".*

In informal and non-formal education, it is this point of encounter that, ultimately, becomes the point of youth work.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Chronology of Policy Initiatives

1987 - Policy of the Youth Service NI DE

1989 - Youth Service Order

1989 - Creation of YCNI

1996-98 Youth Service Review

2001 Youth Work Act Ireland

2002 Beginning of Reform of Public Administration

2014 Priorities for Youth

2015 - 2017 Priorities for Youth Implementation

Appendix 2: Information Sheet for Participants

SUBJECT INFORMATION SHEET

1. **Study Title** – What is the relationship between 4 key youth work processes and the purpose of youth work? *An Investigation into the purpose and practice of youth work in Northern Ireland*

2. Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research project that is being undertaken as part of a PhD academic study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information and do not hesitate to ask if something is unclear or if you would like more information. Please make sure that you are happy to participate, and thank you for taking the time to consider this invitation.

3. What is the purpose of the study?

This study is being undertaken by a professional youth worker/lecturer who intends to explore some of the issues within this area of work. In the Northern Ireland context, the youth work profession appears to be diverse and somewhat disparate, with the definition and purpose being contested. The nature of the study is to investigate what youth work hopes to achieve, and explore what is contrasting and what is universal, in different youth work settings. In examining the functions of youth work and whether it is it achieving these, the study will present a classification of youth work purpose and practices within the Northern Ireland setting that will be helpful to students and professional youth workers in gaining deeper insight to this diverse profession.

4. Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen as a participant as you are a professionally qualified youth worker working within the Northern Ireland setting who may have views that are relevant to the topic. Two different groups of youth workers will be taking part with all participants having been selected from existing youth work networks, and a range of publicly accessible data bases within Northern Ireland.

5. Do I have to take part?

Participation is entirely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you will be given this information sheet to keep, and will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are free to change your mind and withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

6. What will happen to me if I take part?

As a professional youth worker, you will be asked to participate in one of two possible ways. This will either be through participation in a focus group, or through a one-off, 1-1 interview with the named researcher, at a venue that is convenient to you. If you participate in either a focus group or an interview, the discussion will be recorded anonymously via digital recording and transcribed to be used as part of the study. The final research report will be submitted as part of the university PHD requirements, and may be used to contribute towards youth work practice within Northern Ireland. All information will be treated confidentially and destroyed at the end of the study.

7. What do I have to do?

There are no identified restrictions or perceived risks associated with the study, your views are being sought either through written or verbal forms of feedback.

8. Are there any alternative interventions?

There are no alternative interventions anticipated within the study other than those identified.

9. What about side effects?

The researcher does not anticipate any potential side effects within the nature of this study. Contact details for the researcher and academic professionals overseeing the study are provided at the end of this information sheet for contact or clarification during the course of your participation, if necessary.

10. Risks and/or disadvantages?

There are no identified risks or potential disadvantages to taking part. Participation is voluntary and anonymous, and confidentiality will be maintained at all times.

11. Are there any possible benefits in taking part?

The possible benefits of taking part in this study are that your views will form part of new research into youth work purpose and practice, and contribute towards the formation of a classification of youth work practices taking place in Northern Ireland.

12. What if new information becomes available?

Any new information that becomes available during the course of the study and that is relevant to your participation will be brought to your attention. While this is unlikely in this type of study, any options, requirements, plans for termination of

the study, withdrawal of certain participants or modification/amendment, will be fully explained to you.

13. What happens when the study ends?

Your participation in the study will involve a one-off contact. The results of the study will be used for an academic study (PHD) and written up in report form for the University of Ulster in keeping with academic requirements. Part of the anticipated outcome of producing a classification of youth work practice in Northern Ireland will potentially be used as a guidance tool/working model to assist youth work practitioners within their settings.

14. What if something goes wrong?

The researcher is not aware of any complications that would arise as a result of you taking part in this study. However, you will be asked questions that relate to your area of work, and this will involve expressing personal and professional opinions. You will be able to withdraw your participation at any time without any reason being given. You will be provided with contact names to follow up on any aspects of the participation process that you feel uncomfortable with. As the study is part of an academic course, there are University procedures in place for reporting, investigating, recording and handling adverse events. Any complaints will be taken seriously and passed on to key individuals and groups involved in the research. The University is also responsible for approving the study as part of an ethical review process.

15. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

If you consent to take part in the study, your name will not be disclosed, and any information provided will be held securely and in confidence. Any potential means of personal identification will be removed prior to publication as required under Data Protection legislation. However, some non-personal or generalised information will be used that would be significant to the study, e.g. Age, gender, religion, as in keeping with the Freedom of Information legislation.

16. What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of the study will be written for a PHD academic study in keeping with University requirements. Part of the study will potentially be used as a guidance tool/working model to assist youth work practitioners within their settings in Northern Ireland. This may lead to a publication at a later stage, in a youth work journal that would directly contribute to youth work practice and professional development within the sector.

17. Who is organising and funding the research?

As the study is part of an academic course, it is being organised as part of a PHD within University of Ulster requirements. There has been no formal funding sought or provided for the research.

18. Who has reviewed this study?

The research project has been approved by the University of Ulster, School of Education Filter Committee. University supervisors also have responsibility for reviewing the project.

19. Contact details

Named researcher – Mark Hammond, University of Ulster Jordanstown

m.hammond@ulster.ac.uk (Tel: 02890368153)

Chief Investigator – Dr Alan McCully, University of Ulster Jordanstown

aw.mccully@ulster.ac.uk (Tel: 02870124975)

Academic Supervisor – Dr Tony Morgan, University of Ulster Jordanstown

t.morgan@ulster.ac.uk (Tel: 0289036688)

Appendix 3 Consent Forms

Consent Form (Interviews)

Title of Project

What is the relationship between 4 key youth work processes and the purpose of youth work?
An investigation into the purpose and practice of youth work in Northern Ireland

Name of Chief Investigator: Dr Alan McCully

	Please Initial
• I confirm that I have been given and have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have asked and received answers to any questions raised	[ ]
• I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without my rights being affected in any way	[ ]
• I understand that the researchers will hold all information and data collected securely and in confidence and that all efforts will be made to ensure that I cannot be identified as a participant in the study (except as might be required by law) and I give permission for the researchers to hold relevant personal data	[ ]
• I agree to take part in the above study	[ ]

_____
_____

Name of Subject (participant) ***Signature*** ***Date***

_____
_____

Name of person taking consent ***Signature*** ***Date***

_____
_____

Name of researcher ***Signature*** ***Date***

Consent Form (Focus Groups)

Title of Project

What is the relationship between 4 key youth work processes and the purpose of youth work?
An investigation into the purpose and practice of youth work in Northern Ireland

Name of Chief Investigator: Dr Alan McCully

	Please Initial
• I confirm that I have been given and have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have asked and received answers to any questions raised	[ ]
• I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without my rights being affected in any way	[ ]
• I understand that the researchers will hold all information and data collected securely and in confidence and that all efforts will be made to ensure that I cannot be identified as a participant in the study (except as might be required by law) and I give permission for the researchers to hold relevant personal data	[ ]
• I agree to take part in the above study	[ ]

_____
_____

Name of Subject (participant) ***Signature*** ***Date***

_____
_____

Name of person taking consent ***Signature*** ***Date***

_____
_____

Name of researcher ***Signature*** ***Date***

Appendix 4 Focus Group Schedule

Focus Group Schedule

Context and gathering of variables (included in consent form)

Experience, age, gender, religious/community background; Length of time and if qualified as youth worker; Training institute; Experience of youth work

Purpose

The purpose of youth work is thought by some to be lacking in clarity

What do you think of this assertion?

In a sentence or two what would you say is the purpose of youth work?

Defining Characteristics

In your opinion what are the key components and defining characteristics of youth work?

What if anything makes youth work distinctive or unique?

Processes in Youth Work: Introduction to next section – There appear to be a number of processes that are utilised in achieving the purpose of youth work. These might relate to methods of practice, mechanisms, ways of being or underlying principles. Before I ask you about 4 specific processes what would you say some of these processes might be?

4 Key Youth Work Processes (Some of these have probably been named)

What importance do you put on relationship building in youth work? How is this connected to the purpose of youth work?

What is the place of conversation and dialogue in youth work?

Participation is a theme and process that is talked about in youth work – how does it relate to the purpose of youth work?

Learning through experience is emphasised in the literature – what does this mean to you?

What is the relationship of these 4 processes to the overall purpose of youth work?

How do the processes or methods that you use relate to the purpose of youth work?

Appendix 5 Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

Context and gathering of variables – (pre-amble to interview)

Experience, age, gender, religious/community background

Length of time and if qualified as youth worker

Training institute

Experience of youth work: potted history

Purpose

The purpose of youth work is thought to be lacking in clarity

How would you define the purpose of youth work?

What informs your understanding?

Defining Characteristics

In your opinion what are the key components and defining characteristics of youth work?

What if anything makes youth work distinctive or unique?

Introduction to next section: There appear to be a number of processes that are utilised in achieving the purpose of youth work. These might relate to methods of practice, mechanisms, ways of being or underlying principles. Before I ask you about 4 specific processes what would you say some of these processes might be?

4 Key Youth Work Processes (Some of these have probably been named)

Conversation

Conversation is a key youth work process that I have identified in the youth work literature: What emphasis would you place on conversation as a process within youth work?

What is the purpose of conversation?

Supplementary, probing, conversational questions…

Conversation is said to reduce the power imbalance between the young person and the youth worker – what do you think about this perspective?

Relationship Building

Building relationships is sometimes seen as a purpose of youth work in itself – how do you see it?

Supplementary, probing, conversational questions…

What importance would you place upon the relationship building process in youth work? Why?

Participation

Participation has been a focus of much discussion within youth work – What does participation mean in a youth work context?

Supplementary, probing, conversational questions…

What relevance does it have for the purpose of youth work?

Learning Through experience

'learning through experience' is perceived as a youth work process… How do you understand this term in light of your youth work practice? What does learning through experience mean to you?

Supplementary, probing, conversational questions…

What learning experiences have you or your organisation created for/with young people.

Final areas of questions ranking and relationship

How would these four processes rank in order of importance, and would you name any other processes that are more or equally important?

What is the relationship of these 4 processes to the overall purpose of youth work?

Appendix 6 Ethical Approval (RG1 form)

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER **RESEARCH GOVERNANCE**

RG1a APPLICATION TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH ON HUMAN SUBJECTS

PLEASE REFER TO THE NOTES OF GUIDANCE BEFORE COMPLETING THIS FORM. (Available from the Research Governance website at http://www.ulster.ac.uk/research/rg/)

All sections of this form must be completed (use minimum font size 11). If the form is altered in any way it will be returned unconsidered by the Committee.

This form should be used for research in categories A, B and D

Do not use this form for research being conducted in collaboration with the NHS/HPSS (category C).

SECTION A

Chief Investigator	Dr Alan McCully
Title of Project	**What is the relationship between 4 key youth work processes and the purpose of youth work? An Investigation into the purpose and practice of youth work in Northern Ireland**
Student and course (if applicable)	Mark Hammond (PhD study)
Additional Investigators	Dr Tony Morgan

Declaration - Chief Investigator:

I confirm that

- this project meets the definition for research in category* ***(please insert)*** A
- this project is viable and is of research or educational merit;
- all risks and ethical and procedural implications have been considered;
- the project will be conducted at all times in compliance with the research description/protocol and in accordance with the University's requirements on recording and reporting;
- this application has not been submitted to and rejected by another committee; and
- Permission has been granted to use all copyright materials including questionnaires and similar instruments

Signed: **Date:**

Once complete, this application and all associated materials must be submitted for peer review

***In addition, you should complete form RG1d for all category D research and form RG1e for both category B and D research**

Peer Review

- *Those conducting peer review should complete form RG2 and attach it to this form (RG1). RG1, RG2 and all associated materials should then be returned to the Chief Investigator.*
- *Depending upon the outcome of peer review, the Chief Investigator should arrange to submit to the Filter Committee, resubmit the application for further review or consider a new or substantially changed project. The application must not be submitted to the Filter Committee until the peer review process has been completed (except as permitted below)*
- ***Please note that peer review can be conducted by the Filter Committee if time and capacity allow.** This is at the discretion of the Chairperson of each Filter Committee and is subject to change.*

Filter Committee

- *The application must be considered by the Filter Committee in accordance with the requirements of the University*
- *The Filter Committee should complete form RG3 and write to the Chief Investigator indicating the outcome of its review*
- *Depending upon the outcome of the Filter Committee review, the Chief Investigator should arrange to proceed with the research OR submit to the University's Research Ethics Committee OR resubmit the application for further review OR consider a new or substantially changed project*

SECTION B

1. Where will the research be undertaken?

Northern Ireland (Focus groups and interviews with professionally qualified youth workers and managers in their place of work)

2. a. What prior approval/funding has been sought or obtained to conduct this. research? Please also provide the UU cost centre number if known

The research is part of a PhD study which has progressed through application stage and the first and second progress seminar.

b. Please indicate any commercial interest in/sponsorship of the study

None

3. Duration of the Project

Start: Oct 2011	End: Oct 2017	Duration: Six years

4. Background to and reason(s) for the Project

Please provide a brief summary in language comprehensible to a lay person or non-expert. Full details must be provided in the description/protocol submitted with this application (see Notes of Guidance)

The study has developed out of the researcher's interest in, and teaching of community youth work. Due in part to the disparate and diverse range of youth work practice and philosophy the subject has lacked definition and clarity of purpose, arguably since it's inception in the mid 1800s.

The study is therefore focused on the purpose and definition of youth work and in particular its relationship to 4 key processes highlighted in youth work literature.

5. Aims of the Project

Please provide a brief summary in language comprehensible to a lay person or non-expert. Full details must be provided in the description/protocol submitted with this application (see Notes of Guidance)

The overarching aim of the project is to understand, document and analyse the perceptions of key stakeholders across the youth sector in Northern Ireland regarding the purpose of youth work. There are three subsequent aims

1. To facilitate two focus groups of experienced youth workers and gain their understanding of the purpose of youth work
2. To critically examine perspectives of up to 20 key stakeholders across Northern Ireland youth work sector on their understanding of the purpose of youth work through semi structured interviews.
3. To develop a typology of youth work purpose and practice across Northern Ireland

6. Procedures to be used

a. Methods

Please provide a brief summary in language comprehensible to a lay person or non-expert. Full details must be provided in the description/protocol submitted with this application (see Notes of Guidance)

A qualitative methodological approach will be used within the research. There are two proposed phases to the study. Phase 1 will involve conducting two focus groups with Youth workers across the youth work sector. 10 - 15 people will be involved within this phase of the study. Phase 2 will involve interviews with Youth workers and leaders within the youth work sector. 18-22 interviews will take place within this phase of the study.

b. Statistical techniques

Please provide details of the statistical techniques to be used within the project description/protocol (see Notes of Guidance)

7. Subjects:

a. How many subjects will be recruited to the study (by group if appropriate)?

Two focus groups of professionally qualified youth workers	10- 15
Youth workers and leaders with the Youth sector – semi structured qualitative interviews	18 -22

b. Will any of the subjects be from the following vulnerable groups -

	YES	NO
Children under 18		√
Adults with learning or other disabilities		√
Very elderly people		√
Healthy volunteers who have a dependent or subordinate relationship to investigators		√
Other vulnerable groups		√

If YES to any of the above, please specify and justify their inclusion

N/A

c. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Please indicate, with reasons, the inclusion criteria for the project

The project will examine the perspectives, knowledge and position of key stakeholders within the professional youth work sector (NI). Therefore professionally qualified youth workers are the focus of the research.

Please indicate, with reasons, any exclusion criteria for the project

The study investigates the purpose and practice of youth work and therefore is most concerned with the 'professionals' delivering that

e. Please describe how and where recruitment will take place

Recruitment of participants for the two methods of data collection (focus and Interview) will be undertaken by the researcher. Existing youth work networks and a range of publicly accessible data bases will be utilised in the creation of two sample groupings. Purposive and snowball sampling methods will be utilised.

8. Ethical implications of the research

Please provide an assessment of the ethical implications of the project

The research will not necessitate contact with vulnerable groups. However ethical issues regarding the conduct of the researcher, the protocols and the emphasis of the research have been considered. Participants' anonymity, the need for confidentiality and informed consent will be assured throughout the study. These three considerations will necessitate the development of consent forms and protocols for participants and unless waived, the right to anonymity and use of pseudonyms will be adopted as necessary. There will be a need for reassurance of anonymity for participants in the focus groups and interviews, given that some feedback may reflect on current practice issues or dilemmas pertinent to their organisation. Interviews will be recorded and subsequently transcribed. All data collected will be handled in line with university policy and protocol, adhering to the Data Protection Act 2009.

9. Could the research identify or indicate the existence of any undetected healthcare concern?

Yes [ ] **No** [√]

If **Yes**, please indicate what might be detected and explain what action will be taken (e.g. inform subject's GP)

N/A

10. Risk Assessment **

Please indicate any risks to subjects or investigators associated with the project

The research has minimal perceived risks to either subjects or investigators within the project.

****If you wish, you can use form RG1c – Risk Assessment Record (available from the Research Governance website) to help you assess any risks involved**

11. Precautions

Please describe precautions to be taken to address the above

N/A

12. Consent form

It is assumed that as this study is being conducted on human subjects, an information sheet and associated consent form will be provided. A copy of the information sheet and form must be attached to this application. See Notes of Guidance.

If a consent form is not to be used, please provide a justification:

Consent form is attached

13. Care of personal information

Please describe the measures that will be taken to ensure that subjects' personal data/information will be stored appropriately and made available only to those named as investigators associated with the project.

Anonymity of all participants will be promoted and assured from the outset. All data will be password protected, coded and stored in locked cabinets to assure confidentiality. Personal information will be kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and 2009. The data will be made available only to supervisors and will be destroyed 10 years subsequent to the completed study.

14. Copyright

Has permission been granted to use all copyright materials including questionnaires and similar instruments?

Yes [√] **No** [ ]

If **No**, please provide the reason

Once you have completed this form you should also complete form RG1d for all category D research and form RG1e for both category B and D research

Appendix 7 Pen Pictures of the Research Participants

There were 32 research participants within the sample. Presented in the table below is a list of the respondents with some background information on each participant. All data is anonymised to protect the confidentiality of the individuals involved.

Pen Pictures of Focus Groups	
Focus Group 1 (5 members)	**Focus Group 2 (3 Members)**
Employer: Education Authority Position: Youth officer 25 years post qualifying experience Ulster University Graduate Male, Catholic Age 40-49 Work Location: Provincial Town	Employer: Voluntary Sector Organisation Position: Coordinator 21 years post qualifying experience Ulster University Graduate Female, Protestant Age 40-49 Work Location: Urban
Employer: Voluntary Sector Youth Centre Position: Youth Worker in Charge 8 years post qualifying experience Non UU & Ulster University Graduate Female, Catholic Age 40-49 Work Location: Urban	Employer: Voluntary Sector Youth Organisation Position: Team Leader 17 years post qualifying experience Non UU & Ulster University Graduate Male, Catholic Age 40-49 Work Location: Provincial Town/Rural
Employer: Education Authority Position: Youth Worker 7 years post qualifying experience Ulster University Graduate Male, Catholic Age 20-29 Work Location: Urban	Employer: Education Authority Position: Youth officer 7 years post qualifying experience Ulster University Graduate Male, Catholic Age 30-39 Work Location: Urban
Employer: Voluntary Sector Youth Organisation Position: Team Leader 20 years post qualifying experience Non-UU & Ulster University Graduate Male, Catholic Age 40-49 Work Location: Provincial Town/Rural	
Employer: Voluntary Sector Youth Organisation Position: Development Officer 19 years post qualifying experience Ulster University Graduate Female, Protestant, Age 40-49 Work Location: Urban	

Interviews at a Glance	Gender	Religion	Experience	Location	Sector
24 research	12 males 12 females	13 Catholic 11 Protestant	5 – 3-10 yrs 11-20 yrs 21+ yrs	13 Belfast 6 Non-Belfast 5 regional	14 Voluntary 9 Statutory 1 Independent

Pen Picture of Interviewees	
Code: 1MSP Employer: Education Authority Position: Senior Youth officer 26 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 23 years) Non-Ulster University Graduate Male, Catholic Age 40-49 Work Location: Urban	Code: 2MVC Employer: Voluntary Sector Youth Organisation Position: Youth Coordinator 8 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 18 years) Ulster University Graduate Male, Catholic, Age 30-39 Work Location: Urban
Code: 3FSC Employer: Education Authority Position: Senior Youth Worker 10 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 20 years) Ulster University Graduate Female, Catholic Age 30-39 Work Location: Provincial Town/Rural	Code: 4FSC Employer: Education Authority Position: Youth Worker in Charge 13 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 23 years) Non-Ulster University Graduate Female, Catholic Age 40-49 Work Location: Urban
Code: 5MVC Employer: Voluntary Sector Youth Centre Position: Youth Worker in Charge 11 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 23 years) Ulster University Graduate Male, Catholic, Age 40-49 Work Location: Urban	Code: 6MSC Employer: Education Authority Position: Development Officer 24 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 28 years) Ulster University Graduate Male, Catholic, Age 50-59 Work Location: Regional (Northern Ireland)
Code: 7FSC Employer: Education Authority Position: Development Officer 12 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 23 years) Ulster University Graduate Female, Catholic, Age 40-49	Code: 8MVP Employer: Voluntary Sector Youth Centre Position: Youth Project Manager 8 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 12 years) Ulster University Graduate Male, Protestant, Age 30-39

Work Location: Regional (Northern Ireland)	Work Location: Urban
Code: 9FVC Employer: Voluntary Sector Youth Centre Position: Youth Worker in Charge 15 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 19 years) Ulster University Graduate Female, Catholic, Age 30-39 Work Location: Urban	Code: 10FSP Employer: Education Authority Position: Area Youth Worker 7 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 7 years) Ulster University Graduate Female, Protestant, Age 20-29 Work Location: Urban
Code: 11FSP Employer: Education Authority Position: Youth Project Manager 15 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 19 years) Non-Ulster University Graduate Female, Protestant, Age 40-49 Work Location: Urban	Code: 12MVP Employer: Voluntary Sector Youth Organisation Position: Chief Executive Officer 37 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 41 years) Ulster University Graduate Male, Protestant, Age 50-59 Work Location: Regional
Code: 13MVC Employer: Voluntary Sector Youth Centre Position: Senior Youth Worker 12 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 26 years) Ulster University Graduate Male, Catholic, Age 40-49 Work Location: Urban	Code: 14MVP Employer: Voluntary Sector Youth Organisation Position: Manager 13 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 22 years) Ulster University Graduate Male, Catholic Age 40-49 Work Location: Urban
15FVC Employer: Voluntary Sector Youth Centre Position: Youth Director 25 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 27 year) Ulster University Graduate Female, Catholic, Age 50-59 Work Location: Urban	16MVC Employer: Voluntary Sector Youth Centre Position: Senior Youth Worker 9 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 29 years) Ulster University Graduate Male, Catholic, Age 40-49 Work Location: Urban
17FSC Employer: Education Authority Position: Senior Youth Worker 32 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 32 years) Ulster University Graduate	18FSP Employer: Education Authority Position: Youth Worker 12 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 18 years) Ulster University Graduate

Female, Catholic, Age 50-59 Work Location: Urban	Female, Catholic, Age 50-59 Work Location: Urban
Code: 19MVC Employer: Voluntary Sector Youth Organisation Position: Project Manager 7 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 11 years) Ulster University Graduate Male, Catholic, Age 30-39 Work Location: Urban	Code: 20FVP Employer: Voluntary Sector Youth Organisation Position: Development Officer 7 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 17 years) Ulster University Graduate Female, Protestant, Age 30-39 Work Location: Urban
Code:21FVP Employer: Self Employed Youth Work Position: Consultant 9 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 17 years) Ulster University Graduate Female, Protestant, Age 40-49 Work Location: Urban	Code: 22MVP Employer: Education Authority Position: Senior Youth Worker 18 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 23 years) Ulster University Graduate Male, Protestant, Age 40-49 Work Location: Urban
Code: 23FVP Employer: Voluntary Sector Youth Organisation Position: Youth Project Worker 6 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 7 years) Ulster University Graduate Female, Protestant, Age 20-29 Work Location: Urban	Code: 24MVC Employer: Voluntary Sector Youth Centre Position: Youth Project Coordinator 10 years post qualifying experience (Length of experience in Youth Work - 12 years) Ulster University Graduate Male, Catholic, Age 30-39 Work Location: Urban

Appendix 8 Proforma for Prioritising the Processes

Focus group (Priority Form)

Potential processes utilised in youth work

Please rank the following youth work processes in order of importance and add any which you feel are missing (1 = most important etc)

- ☐ Relationship building
- ☐ Learning through experience
- ☐ Participation
- ☐ Conversation and dialogue
- ☐ *OTHER (please state/explain)* _____
- ☐ *OTHER (please state/explain)* _____

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